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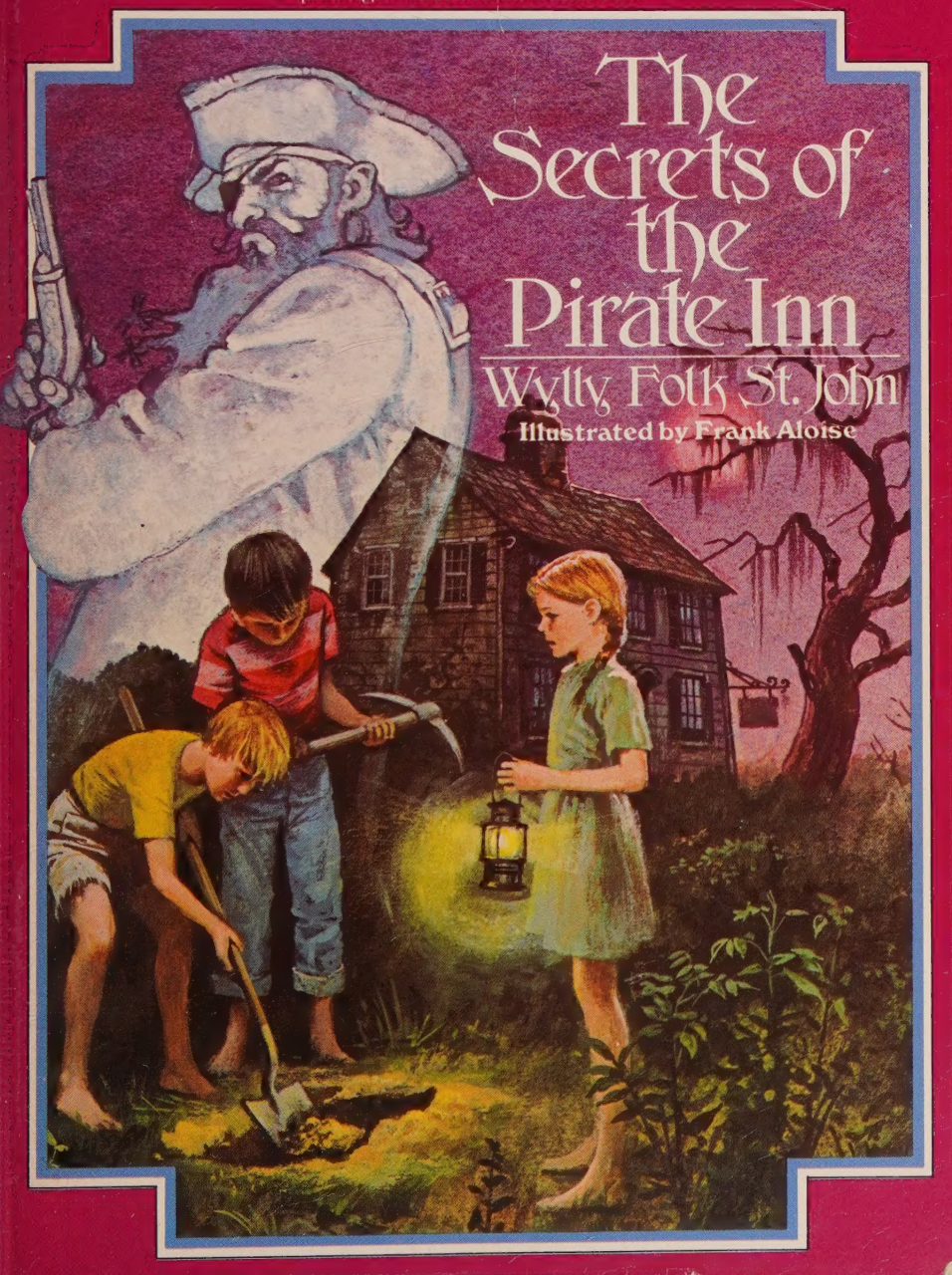

The Secrets of the Pirate Inn

Wylly Folk St. John

Illustrated by Frank Aloise

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The Secrets of the Pirate Inn

WYLLY FOLK ST. JOHN

AN AVON CAMELOT BOOK

This book, with love, is for the real Sally and Amy and Jack; and for my mother, who first told me about William Mr. Trimbletoe.

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WYLLY FOLK ST. JOHN is a true Southerner. She was born in South Carolina, spent her childhood in Savannah, graduated from the University of Georgia in Athens, and is now living in Social Circle, not far from Atlanta. She is employed as a staff writer for the Magazine Section of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*.

A Pirate Hangout

They were all in the family room that morning when the surprising letters came.

Jack brought in the mail and put it down in front of Mama, who was sitting at the table stringing beans. Then he stood close to her with both elbows on the table and his chin on his fists. One leg was twisted around the other, and his uptilted backside just invited somebody to slap it. But Amy was too far away to do it for him right then.

Across the table Sally was doing a buttonhole in the blouse she was making for Amy; she pulled the thread tight before she paused. "Any for me?" she said.

Amy leaned over Mama's other shoulder and read aloud from the top envelope, "Mr. William Durden?"

"What in the world—?" Mama said, putting the bowl on the table and gathering up her apron with the beans in it, to keep them from scattering.

"But it's got our address," Amy said. "And look at the funny slogan printed on it." She read aloud, " 'It's Great to Be a Grand Old Man (or Lady) in the Golden Age Haven.' "

Sally, also puzzled, reached for the envelope. "William Durden was our grandfather's name."

"As if we didn't know that," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, he's not a grand old man exactly; he's dead."

"He died before we were born," Sally confirmed, handing back the letter to Mama after assuring herself, Amy thought sarcastically, that her younger sister could still read. "So what is somebody doing writing to him now, Mom? Here?"

"Well, this was his house," Amy pointed out, practicing the tone that Sally called her maddening voice. "The old Durden place, remember? So it was his address. And if somebody didn't know he had died—"

"But that was nearly seventeen years ago," Sally said, figuring.

"You're only sixteen," Jack remarked provokingly, stressing the six.

"That's six years older than you are, smarty. And what has that got to do with it anyhow? Grandpa Durden died the year before I was born; that's all I said."

"Four years before I was born," Amy said. "Mama, why d'you reckon somebody's writing to him now?"

Mama had already slit the envelope. "Quit that eternal squabbling, children. There's just one way to find out."

"Hey!" Amy said. "Here's one for you, Sally, from Carol." She leaned over and with one finicky finger separated the rest of the envelopes to see the names on them. "Hey!" she said in a different tone, a much more startled tone. "Here's—you won't believe it—another letter addressed to Grandpa Durden!"

"You've gotta be kidding," Sally said. "That's too weird."

Jack squeezed across Mama to look. "Matter-of-fact, he's a very popular guy today."

Mama shoved Jack's blond head back and elbowed Amy out of her own dark-blonde hair. "Give me room to breathe, children," she said in what they cheerfully referred to as her tired-of-being-a-mother voice.

"Well, tell us," Sally begged impatiently. She didn't even open her letter from Carol, though Amy handed it over. "What's it all about?"

Mama was reading the first letter rapidly. "It's from a Miss Dibble of the Welfare Department in Port Oglethorpe, Georgia. They think my father is still alive and were writing to him about—why, it's about Uncle Will! They believe my father is his closest relative, and want him to sign papers so they can take care of Uncle Will in the county's Golden Age Haven, because he's eighty-

eight and hasn't any money and they think he's too old to live alone and look after himself any longer."

"And who's Uncle Will?"

"Didn't I ever tell you about Uncle Will? Well, I guess not—Papa had lost touch with him a long time before he died, of course, and I'd never seen him at all. I'd forgotten about him entirely. He was a sort of legend to me, though, when I was growing up, like John Henry or Paul Bunyan—"

"I know all about them," Jack said.

"Who doesn't?" Amy said. "Shut up. Go on, Mom."

"Well, he was the kind of relative who would drive parents out of their minds, but would enchant you children, I'm afraid. He did all sorts of outrageous things with my father when Papa was a little boy—made up wild stories for him about things he had done as a young man which he probably hadn't done at all, but Papa believed them. One I remember was about finding a huge diamond on some land he owned in North Georgia. And he had Papa doing every kind of outlandish thing he could think of, such as fishing through ice like the Eskimos once when the lake froze over; and the ice broke and Papa caught pneumonia as well as one teeny little fish. And one vacation he and Papa went to live a whole week in a tenant house with a farmer he knew, to pick cotton. Papa got fifty cents when they sold the cotton to the gin—the first money he ever earned. And

once Uncle Will took Papa to Atlanta on the train, which was quite an experience—"

"I guess it was," Jack said enviously. "I've never ridden on a train, you know, Mama. Why don't we get to go on a train sometimes instead of just in cars and airplanes?"

"Because you haven't got an Uncle Will, I guess," Mama said.

"But we have," Sally pointed out. "Isn't he sort of our uncle too? If he was Grandpa's uncle, he'd be your great-uncle, and our great-great-uncle."

"But he's too old to do anything that's fun, now," Amy said sadly. "Eighty-eight! Imagine being eighty-eight."

"Read the other letter, please, Mom?" Jack said impatiently. "It might be something more exciting."

"Once Uncle Will persuaded a circus man he knew," Mama said as she went on remembering, holding the second letter still unread in her hand, teasing them with the suspense, "to let him and Papa dress up and be clowns with the circus for one performance. Papa fell off the elephant and broke his arm—but he never forgot that elephant. Her name was Bella. And Uncle Will was always making up games and puzzles and rhymes for Papa, and they wrote a book together. I still have it somewhere among Papa's things in the attic, I guess, if the silverfish haven't eaten it."

"What was it about?" Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, I've always wanted to write a book."

"I don't remember—some preposterous nonsense. I remember Papa showing it to me, though, when I was about ten, and telling me how much fun it had been to draw the pictures and color them with some paints Uncle Will made one day when Papa had a cold and couldn't go out and play in the snow. Come to think about it, maybe Uncle Will was the one who invented finger paints—the illustrations looked like finger painting. He used Grandma's food coloring and laundry starch and some dye she had been saving for something else, and walnut hulls to make brown. She was at a church meeting. I guess they messed up her kitchen pretty thoroughly—she didn't admire the book much. She didn't care for Uncle Will's dogs, either. He always had a dog or two. My father's favorite was a black-and-white, very-mixed-breed dog named Barkis. His father was an Eskimo Spitz, they thought, and his mother some kind of a terrier. He had a white upcurved tail, and he loved Papa and Uncle Will and hated everybody else. Grandma couldn't go near him—in her own kitchen!—without getting snarled at. He even bit her once."

"Sounds like a good dog," Jack said. "I bet Barkis would've liked me too."

"Amy's the one animals love." Sally snubbed him.

"Ho—just because she wants to be a veterinarian—"

"But Grandma must have missed Uncle Will around the garden after he left," Mama went on. "His fingers were all green thumbs, Papa used to say. Uncle Will grew wonderful flowers. Maybe Grandma would have liked him better if he'd grown corn and tomatoes."

"Did she run him off?" Amy asked. "I mean, how come your papa lost track of him when he grew up?"

"I wonder," Mama said. "All Papa knew was that one day Uncle Will told him he had to go down to the coast—that he and Barkis were going to be beachcombers for a while, and did Papa want to come too. Of course Papa did. But Grandma wouldn't let him. I suspect she might have been getting rid of Uncle Will and his dog at last—he wasn't her brother; he was Grandpa's, and maybe it was a nuisance to have a brother-in-law around, especially one who kept her only child so stirred up all the time. I wondered why Uncle Will didn't write—"

"Maybe he did at last," Jack said. "Maybe this letter is from him."

"What did he call Grandpa?—Was he named William for Uncle Will?" Sally asked. Mama nodded.

"Uncle Will called him Willie, but he was William to everybody else. And Papa said probably Uncle Will did write, but sent the letters by carrier pigeon or threw them in the ocean in a bottle. That would have been just

like him. Anyhow, Papa never heard from him. He decided beachcombers don't care much about keeping in touch."

"Then Grandpa grew up and got married," Sally said thoughtfully.

"And after a while," Amy said, "he was so grown-up he didn't even wonder any more where Uncle Will was or why he didn't write."

"Except," Jack said dreamily, "he never forgot how it was to be a clown on an elephant named Bella, or to catch a fish through ice like an Eskimo."

Sally had finished the buttonhole now and had laid her sewing down. She was absent-mindedly stroking her hair down, the way she always did when her hands weren't busy with something else, trying to make it hang straight and turned up at the ends. Mama wouldn't let her iron it to take the natural curl out, the way some of the girls did. Amy sometimes tried halfheartedly to make hers straight too, but she didn't care awfully about being in, the way Sally did. She wouldn't have let Sally know it for the world, but she wasn't really in love with a single one of The Monkees either. She didn't love one of The Animals, or a Beatle, or anybody. Sometimes she even played Mama's old soft sweet records instead of Sally's, when she was alone in the house.

But she was as curious as Sally, and chimed in with, "Yes, Mom, do," when Sally said, "Read that other letter, Mama, why don't you?"

Jack said, "Matter-of-fact, it's sure to be from Uncle Will! If they're trying to get him—"

"He might need help!" Amy caught on excitedly. "Oh, Mom, let's go help him!"

Her mother was reading the letter. "It is from Uncle Will," she murmured. "How did you guess, Jack?"

A folded paper dropped from between the pages to the table. Amy couldn't wait; she unfolded it quickly and glanced at it. "Why—" she said in surprise, "it's nothing but an old counting-out rhyme!"

"Let me see." Jack grabbed it and looked. "Funny way to count out. I never heard of it."

"Lots of things you never heard of," Amy said.

Jack read the page aloud:

"William Mr. Trimbletoe,
He's a good fisherman;
Catches fishes, puts them in dishes;
Catches hens, puts them in pens;
Some lay eggs, some none.
Wire, briar, limber lock,
Three geese in a flock.
One flew east; one flew west;
One flew over the two gooses' nest.

The clock ran down; the hands turned around.
O-u-t spells *out*, with a dirty dishrag!"

Mama was reading the letter in her hand over again, with a very troubled look. "I don't quite know what I ought to do," she said, mostly to herself.

"May I read it, Mama?" Sally asked. Mama nodded, still thinking.

Sally scanned the wavering, cramped, elderly-looking handwriting, and read it out, with some unwanted help from Amy and Jack, who were now looking over her shoulders. " 'Dear Willie,' " the letter said, " 'if you are still at the old place and get this, I want you to know that when I die, you will have my diamond and all the money I got when I sold my North Georgia land—if you can find them. (I bought this place with what I got for the timber they cut from it earlier.) I've put a will leaving everything to you in my big dictionary. I hid the money and the diamond so that Miss Dibble couldn't find them. She's been trying for over a year to get me to turn everything over to the state to pay my board for the rest of my life in the Golden Age Haven for Senior Citizens. That means Old Folks' Home, in plain English, and I'm not about to let them get me. She says I'm too old to look after things by myself any longer. When I get too old for that I'll be dead.' "

"Poor old Uncle Will," Amy said.

"Good for him!" Jack applauded.

Sally read on, " 'But she may be right that I'm getting a little bit forgetful these days. I hate to admit it, Willie, and don't ever let Miss D. know, but I've actually forgotten where I hid the money and the diamond. I hid them so well I can't find them anywhere. I have that tantalizing feeling that I almost know—but can't quite remember. All I know for sure is that when I think about the diamond, a Spanish dancer keeps coming to mind; and I know I wrote down this old game we used to play, "William Mr. Trimbletoe," to remind me how to find the money in a way Miss Dibble could never figure out. Trouble is, now I can't figure it out either. Do you remember when we used to count out with "William Mr. Trimbletoe"? I thought maybe you could work out from it what I could have done with my money. You were pretty good at solving the puzzles I used to make up for you when you were little.

" 'I guess you didn't ever get the letters I wrote you when I first left the old home, did you? Probably your mother thought it best not to give them to you. I wish now that I had gone back to see you. But at the time I hated to bother her when she didn't want me around. If you get this letter, Willie, after so long, would you come to see me? My place is what's left of an old pirate inn, on the coast near Port Oglethorpe. You might like it—it was a real pirates' hangout—' "

"Pirates!" Jack couldn't keep still. "Real pirates!"

" '—when there were pirates on these seas, and it has an underground passage—' "

"Underground passage!"

" '—from behind the bar to a hole in the bluff opening on the beach. Pirates used to shanghai men who got drunk at the bar in the inn, and take them out through this tunnel to put them aboard the ship. When they woke up they were far out at sea under a skull-and-crossbones flag. You used to like *Treasure Island*, Willie. Do come. It would be great to see you again. As ever, Uncle Will.' "

"Poor Uncle Will," Amy said again. "It's so sad that he didn't know he couldn't ever see Willie again."

"But he could see us," Jack said excitedly. "Maybe you-all could call me Willie when we go down there. After all, my second name is William. Mama, we're going, aren't we? School was out just in time, wasn't it?"

"I don't know," Mama said. "We'll have to see what your dad thinks about it all. Maybe a few days on the coast would be a pretty good beginning to your vacation—if your dad thinks we can afford it. Somebody ought to go and see about Uncle Will, of course—and see Miss Dibble, and find out whether Uncle Will really does need to be taken care of or not. His letter sounds as though he might. And remember, she's no villain, the way you-all seem to think. She's just trying to help."

"He'd rather be dead," Amy said positively. "Oh, Mom, don't let her help him!"

"He could come and live here with us," Jack said.

"Where would we put him?" Sally said practically. "We're busting out at the seams now. Besides, I doubt if he'd come. He sounds to me like a mighty independent old cuss who'd fight everybody—who'd defend to the death, like Voltaire said, his right to stay in his own house even if he was sick and starving. At least, I think it was Voltaire."

"Voltaire never said anything like that," Mama had to tell her. "He was talking about freedom of speech. 'I don't agree with a word you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.' "

"Anyhow, let's go and help Uncle Will fight 'em off," Amy begged. "Please, Mom? We're going to? I'll go and start packing."

"I told you I'd talk to your father," Mama said. "He doesn't get his vacation until August; he won't be able to get away right now, I'm certain. But he might not mind if we went for a few days. If he has the money to spare for us to take a vacation as early as June."

"It won't cost much," Amy said. "We can stay with Uncle Will, of course."

"In the old pirates' inn!" Jack said, gloating.

"He might not have any spare beds," Mama said. "It

wouldn't be like Uncle Will to have any company beds."

"An inn must have had rooms fixed up," Amy argued.

"Silly—he surely bought it unfurnished," Sally pointed out. "It wasn't still a pirates' inn when he bought it. They were all gone by then."

"Hung from the yardarm," Jack said with satisfaction. "Or maybe they'd walked the plank."

"The inn was probably falling down," Mama said dryly, "if it was built in the days when there were still pirates on the coast of Georgia. And if Uncle Will is the way Papa described him, he probably didn't bother to fix it up much. He's probably still just camping out in a room or two that haven't quite tumbled down. That'll likely turn out to be why Miss Dibble is worried about him."

"We can take our sleeping bags, then," Jack planned. "And the cot for you, Mama. Matter-of-fact, that would be cool—to camp out in a pirates' hangout. I could write a real neat theme about it next fall when my teacher wants us to write about what we did on our vacation."

"We'll pack right now, just in case," Amy said again. "Come on, Jack."

"There'll be plenty of time to pack after Daddy decides," Sally said. "But if we're going, Mama, let me

know in time to break my date for Saturday night, will you, please? —I don't really mind," she added hastily. "I'd rather go to Uncle Will's, of course. It's only Tim."

"Hold everything, children," Mama said. "Amy, you and Sally get in that kitchen and finish the dishes. Jack, I'll bet you haven't taken out the garbage yet. Let's all do our day's work before we even think about doing anything else."

"Pirates never had to take out garbage," Jack grumbled. "Matter-of-fact, pirates probably didn't even eat out of dishes at all, or have any garbage. They just gnawed big old drumsticks and threw the bones over their shoulders for the ship's cats."

"Ho!" Amy scoffed, dragging him into the kitchen by one arm. "How'd they gnaw their turnip greens without dishes, huh?"

"Matter-of-fact, all the pirates I ever heard about never ate turnip greens," Jack said loftily. "They'd have walked the plank before they'd've taken one single solitary bite of icky old turnip greens."

"I wish you'd quit saying 'matter-of-fact' so much," Amy said. "It's maddening."

"Matter-of-fact, that's why—" Jack began.

The phone rang, a loud ring that sounded urgent, and Sally leaped to answer it, calling, "Amy, you start the dishes and I'll be right there."

Amy wasn't about to start the dishes without seeing whether the call might be for her. She leaped too, but Sally got there first. Amy heard her say, "Wait a minute, please," and then to Mama, "It's a telegram. What'll I say? It's a telegram—for Mr. William Durden."

At The Bucket of Blood

Mama went to the phone. The children listened while she persuaded the operator to read her the night letter even though she wasn't Mr. William Durden who had been dead for seventeen years.

"Thank you," she said finally, scribbling on the phone pad rapidly. "Would you repeat it, please?" checking what she had written down. With another "Thank you," she hung up.

"Was it from Uncle Will?"

"No. From Miss Dibble."

"What'd she say?"

Sally took the pad Mama handed her and read to the others: " 'Please come at once. Your uncle says someone is hiding in his house trying to kill him and get his money. This is a delusion. He has no money. But if some relative will not come immediately, and see about him, we will reluctantly have to get the court to authorize us to take over his care. The court will com-

mit him if there is no one else to do it. Signed, Corine Dibble.' Icky name, Corine," she added thoughtfully.

"Don't blame Miss Dibble," Mama repeated. "She's just doing her job. It's a thankless job, trying to help people who don't want to be helped."

"She could just mind her own business and let them alone," Amy said.

"That is her business, I'm afraid." Mama sighed.

Jack was reading the scribble over again. "What's she mean by a delusion? She means she thinks Uncle Will's flipped?"

"I guess so," Sally told him.

"But he does have some money," Amy said, "if he could only think where he put it. Mama, we've just got to go and help him find it."

"Then he could hire somebody to take care of him. Like a manservant," Sally proposed. "And Miss Dibble wouldn't need to bother about him."

"What do you know about manservants?" Amy jeered. "We never saw a manservant in our lives—unless you count yardmen like Pledge."

"I can read, can't I? And families on TV have them. Uncle Will could have one if he had plenty of money."

"I suppose your dad will agree that we just about have to go," Mama said, "after that wire. We'll leave very early tomorrow morning. So finish your chores and you can pack a few things. One bag each. Play

clothes and swimsuit and one nice outfit apiece. Wear shorts and sneakers, but take your good shoes and some socks, just in case. Don't take anything superfluous. We'll need the space in the trunk for that cot and the sleeping bags. Something tells me we're bound to need those. I'll talk to your father on the phone and then send Uncle Will a wire—though it's probably no use. He's not likely to get it, living way off from nowhere on the beach—I guess."

"Why don't we phone him?" Jack suggested.

"Silly," Amy said. "Uncle Will wouldn't have a phone."

They were well on the way the next morning before Amy let out what she and Jack had been giggling about in the car's back seat. "I sneaked in something superfluous," she confessed.

"What?" Sally demanded, turning half around from where she sat, by right of age, beside Mama in front.

"It's—" Jack started to tell.

"I told you—" Mama said in exasperation.

"Oh, it doesn't take up much room. It's only the Ouija board," Amy said. "I thought it might help, when we get around to trying to figure out what that rhyme has to do with the money being hidden and all. We can ask the Ouija, when we get stuck."

"We're already stuck," Jack said, grumbling. "Matter-of-fact, I don't think we'll ever find out what that stupid rhyme means. I thought about it all night, and I didn't get a single clue to—"

"Clues!" Amy caught him up excitedly. "That's what it is, of course. Everything mentioned in the rhyme is a clue. See? William Mr. Trimbletoe—that's Uncle Will, because his name is William—"

"And he's probably a good fisherman," Sally threw in, "since he's lived on the coast so long."

"That takes care of that much," Amy said. " 'Catches fishes, puts them in dishes.' What could that mean? Something is in dishes maybe—the money? Or another clue? Like when you're playing Treasure Hunt and one clue leads to the next until you finally find the treasure."

"I think we'll have to wait," Sally said, "until we get there and see Uncle Will's place. His dishes, for instance. If he has any."

"I reckon so," Amy agreed. "Then maybe we can tell what the other clues mean. 'Catches hens, puts them in pens.' I do hope Uncle Will keeps a few chickens, so we can look around their pens."

"They won't lay very many eggs, I bet," Jack prophesied, "if we go digging for treasure under their nests."

" 'Some lay eggs, some none,' " Sally reminded him.

"It was 'two gooses' nest,' " Amy said. "Do you s'pose he keeps geese too?"

"Not geese, 'gooses,' " Mama said. "Why such a strange plural, I wonder? Uncle Will went to college —he knew better than that.

"The rhyme was a little bit different when I heard it," she went on. "Oh, I didn't hear it from Papa—I don't remember that he ever mentioned that particular rhyme to me. But I've been hearing what country folks call 'play-party' rhymes all my life, and that's one with a number of variations. In one version the line you were talking about was 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest,' instead of 'two gooses' nest.' And there was another version in which the part about 'The clock ran down, the hands turned around' was 'The clock fell down, the hands ran around.' Instead of 'with a dirty dishrag,' another one says, '*O-u-t* spells *out*, you old dirty dishrag!' "

"But," Sally said reflectively, "we'd better stick to the way Uncle Will wrote it down, hadn't we, because that's what he hid the money by?"

"Sounds reasonable," Amy said.

"We're pretty sure he had some money?" Mama said, smiling. "We don't think maybe he imagined it, the way Miss Dibble said?"

" 'Course not," Jack said. "It wouldn't be any fun, if we thought that."

"Besides, there's the diamond," Sally remembered. "You said he told your father about finding that diamond, a long time ago, before he got old and—what's the word? Senile? So there is a diamond somewhere."

"But it might not have been a diamond, actually," Mama said. "Georgia isn't exactly a good place to find diamonds; they're almost never found in this state. There was a story in the paper once about an authenticated case of a diamond found in North Georgia—not Uncle Will's—but it was said to be a very unusual thing. Rubies, yes—there are corundum mines, and even a few emeralds have been found up near the North Carolina line; and there are plenty of amethysts and some aquamarine ore. But hardly ever diamonds."

"Well, Uncle Will's diamond was unusual too," Amy said. "If he had wanted to, he probably could have had his written up in the paper."

"Papa did say Uncle Will told about having some diamond expert look at it, and the expert declared it really was a diamond and worth a lot of money," Mama conceded. "But of course Uncle Will might have just been making it sound like a good story, for a little boy."

"I believe him," Jack said firmly. "Matter-of-fact, I believe everything Uncle Will ever told was the truth. He sounds like a truthful man, to me."

"Sometimes," Mama said, "stories are truer than if they were factual."

"You mean, some things are true even if they didn't really happen?"

"That's right," Sally said. "Like Adam and Eve."

"Let's don't go into that," Mama said, a bit hurriedly. "Though I guess I did mean an allegory is sometimes truer than mere facts. Let's sing, shall we? 'I was born ten thousand years ago—' "

They sang until time for lunch, and after they found a hamburger place and ate, Amy and Jack toppled over against each other and fell asleep. When they woke up, they had left all the hills behind and were on a long, straight stretch of road with pools of water on its edges, where blue flags grew, and every tree they saw was hung with gray Spanish moss drifting in the slight breeze.

"That one looks like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's beard," Amy said. "But I think it wasn't quite that long in the picture of him in my American lit. book."

"Henry Ward Beecher's was longer," Sally offered.

"Who cares?" Jack said disgustedly. "Old girls are always talking about hair. If it's not their own hair it's some stupid stuff on an old man's face. Or a tree, for cripes' sake!"

"Don't use that expression, Jack," Mama said mechanically.

"Why not? Kids use it in books."

"I don't like it; that's why not. It's a euphemism. When you're old enough to swear by any words you like, I hope you'll manage without euphemisms. They sound even worse than the words they're being used to avoid."

"I didn't know it was a—that thing you said. I thought it was a kid-type cuss word."

"So don't use it," Sally said in her superior-big-sister tone. "Even if Kerry did in that book I let you read."

"What book was that?" Mama said.

"Patrick Dennis's *The Joyous Season.* Haven't you read it, Mama? It's hilarious. The boy supposed to be telling the story is just about Jack's age; so I thought he'd like it."

"I didn't though," Jack said. "That stupid kid didn't have a thing to do every day but listen to grownups talking. I can think of a million things better than that to do. Grownups are kooky."

"Let's change the subject," Amy proposed. She hadn't read *The Joyous Season* herself. She was wishing Daddy could have come too; but he'd had to go to New York on business anyhow and wouldn't have to stay home by himself every night. "I bet Daddy would like to be with us," she said aloud. "How much farther to Port Oglethorpe, Mama?"

"I think we're coming into it now," Mama said.

"Just think—we've traveled all the way from the mountains to the sea, in one day!"

"It took Sherman's army all spring and summer," Sally said.

"They had to march on their own feet, though," Amy said. "But let's find out real quick the way to the beach. It must be somewhere else. This town doesn't seem to have any beach." She could see past the main street's weather-silvered buildings to the brown water, but there were long, gray plank docks with dozens of large, graceful boats moored at the water's edge, not sand. The scene looked like a picture: the boats had nets draped from tall masts, drying in the sun.

"It's just a little way to the ocean," Mama said. "That water's probably the St. Anne's River."

"Funny kind of boats," Jack said. "They all have girls' names. *Maria Teresa—Caterina Lucia—Louisa Maria*—look at them!"

"They're shrimp boats," Mama told him. "Port Oglethorpe has a shrimp fleet. The shrimpers—I think they're mostly Portuguese, from a colony that settled here long ago—go out to Banks where the shrimp are plentiful and catch them with those big nets. There's a canning factory here too, and a freezing plant; so they have a market for all they can catch. I read a Sunday Magazine story about this picturesque little town not long ago. I hope we're going to be here just at the right

time for something interesting they have every June—The Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet. You could write about that for your school paper."

"What do they do at the—?"

"Well, this article described how all the boats are scrubbed up and painted freshly and decorated with flags and flowers. They start like a parade—on the water—at some given place in the Sound and sail in a long line up the river to the dock. The owner and his family and friends are on each boat's deck. Every one has a pretty girl the owner has chosen to be 'Miss Santa Maria' or 'Miss Maria Teresa' or whatever, to represent his boat, standing like a figurehead at the prow. One of the girls—supposedly the prettiest—is crowned Queen of the Shrimp Fleet. The boats as they float by the dock are sprinkled with holy water and blessed by a priest so that they'll have good fishing all season. After they're all blessed, they sail out to sea a good way and drop wreaths of flowers for each shrimper who died during the past year."

"Wish we could go on one of the boats!" Sally said.

"Ho!" Amy scoffed. "You want to be Queen of the Shrimp Fleet? Not a chance. You wouldn't know a shrimp from a tadpole—that is, until it's ready to eat."

"Freckles won't do it either," Sally teased. When Sally was being a specially nice older sister, she always told Amy that freckles looked smashing with gold-red

hair like hers and Amy's. Amy might have believed it, if Sally had had some freckles too. But Sally had lovely pale skin, with merely a sprinkle of the little tan spots across her nose. Amy admitted that she had a few more than Sally; but she kept telling herself that she didn't care; her dad had had lots of freckles when he was a boy; he'd even been called Speck. And now you could just barely see them if you were looking for them real hard.

"I like having freckles," she retorted. "Freckles are neat. Doris Day has them. Why, she practically makes a career out of having freckles!"

"Well, I'd rather go on a pirate boat than a shrimp boat," Jack said. "If I could."

"Let's ask somebody where the old pirate inn is," Amy urged.

Mama said, "Here's a filling station. I'll talk to the man while you-all go to the rest room."

"I don't need to go now," Jack grumbled.

"You go," Sally said firmly. "You're the one always has to go as soon as we get started again."

"Oh, all right."

Mama bought the gas and got the directions. Amy came back and listened; somebody usually had to help Mama remember directions, and Sally had said for her to do it this time because she wanted to comb her hair and fix her lipstick. Ever since her twelfth birthday

Amy had been allowed to use a pale-pink lipstick too, if she wanted, but all that stuff was too much trouble.

"See that road?" the filling-station man said. "It goes a few miles parallel to the river and then it comes out on the Sound. Nice beach there. But there's an oyster-shell road that turns off the pavement just before it gets to the beach, and runs down toward a bluff. You'll see the old place you were asking about, Mr. Will's place, as soon as you turn right on that little road. It has two big live oaks in front."

"With moss on them?" Amy asked.

"Yep, sister, all the trees around here have moss on them," the man answered indulgently. "The old place is about to fall down, but Mr. Will won't leave it, and I don't blame him. She"—he didn't identify Miss Dibble, but Amy recognized her—"said no dogs are allowed in that Golden Age Home, and what would Buster do if Mr. Will went there? She said the Humane Society would take care of Buster, but Mr. Will said Buster hasn't got any more use for that kind of help than he has. He wishes they'd leave him alone—says he and Buster would get along fine if they weren't being welfared to death. —Say, are you relatives of his? Does he know you're coming?"

"Yes, we're relatives, and no, he doesn't know we're coming," Mama told him.

"But he'll be glad to see us," Amy said confidently,

"because we don't want him and Buster to be welfared to death, either. That's why we're coming to help him."

"Well, let me know if you need reinforcements," the filling-station man said. "My pa used to go fishing with Mr. Will a lot before Pa died and Mr. Will got too old, and they took me sometimes. I like the old guy. He knew where to get the best shrimp for bait—in a creek that runs off the St. Anne's, a little way upstream. He could stand in the end of his bateau and cast that net of his just once and pull in more bait than we could use all weekend. And he used to take us marsh-hen hunting. I guess you've heard of The Marshes of Glynn? They're right up the coast a way, in Glynn County. Mr. Will knew a long poem about them, that he used to recite every time we went hunting marsh hens. 'As the marsh hen secretly builds on the watery sod, Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.' He said a Georgia man wrote it, named Sidney Lanier. Funny how I remember that so well. I reckon it's because he told me so often."

"Since you know Uncle Will," Mama said, "how do you think he is? Do you think he's still able to manage by himself—or does he need looking after, the way the Welfare people think?"

"Lady, I don't know anybody who's better able to manage by himself than Mr. Will. His housework don't

drudge him a-tall, like it would a woman. He's got a power of old things he's picked up here and there that he never bothers to dust—he just enjoys looking at 'em. He sweeps the floor about once a month, and cooks when he feels like it. Oh, it's a great way for a man to live—if he don't care about having a wife and family."

"You'd like to be a beachcomber too," Amy guessed.

"Reckon I would, sis—if, like I say, I didn't have a wife."

"But Uncle Will's eighty-eight," Mama said.

"Sure, he's too old to do all the things he used to do," the filling-station man said. "He can't handle a bateau and cast for shrimp by himself now, and he's too shaky to shoot marsh hens. But he goes crabbing and fishing off those jetties by his place, and catches plenty for him and Buster. He taught Buster to catch fish too—catches 'em in his mouth, when a fish gets hemmed up in a shallow pool after the tide goes out. And you ought to see that dern fool dog eat crab and spit out the shells."

Sally and Jack had come back now and were listening. Jack asked, "Is Buster a black-and-white dog with his tail curving up?"

"How'd you know?"

"I just thought he was," Jack told him with satisfaction. "Matter-of-fact, Uncle Will always has a dog like that."

"Is he pretty well most of the time?" Mama asked, still troubled. "He probably won't tell me. What if he got sick, there by himself?"

"When we found it out, some of us would go and help him. Everybody likes Mr. Will. I'd go myself, or anybody would. Miles Cameron has the beach shack that's closest to Mr. Will's, though, and Miles goes over there just about every day, just to see that he's okay. Of course he doesn't let Mr. Will know he's looking out for him. Besides, he enjoys the old man. Miles is one of these here young writer fellows, and he gets lots of stories from Mr. Will, he says. Trouble with that Welfare sister is, she don't think a soul over sixty can get along without her help. I got news for her. She don't really know Mr. Will."

"Well, I'm glad his friends think he can manage," Mama said, "because I'm afraid whoever tried to change his mind about that nice Golden Age place would run into trouble. How long since you saw him, though? Miss Dibble sent a wire saying he thought someone was hiding in his house, trying to kill him and get his money."

"He hasn't mentioned it to me," the filling-station man said thoughtfully. "But I haven't seen him for about a week. Guess I'd better call Miles and see if Mr. Will said anything to him. Mr. Will might've just told

her that to give her something to worry about, you know. He likes to worry that Welfare sister. Once he told her he hadn't a relative left in the world. He could have kicked himself, he said, when he let it slip later that he did have a nephew at Jasper, Georgia, named for him."

"My father. She wrote to him. So did Uncle Will. But since my father's dead, we came instead."

"After he made that slip of the tongue, Mr. Will told the Welfare sister that he has a gracious plenty of relatives—he just don't care too much for them, so he leaves them alone and they leave him alone. Like he wishes the Welfare would, he told her." He laughed. "But I expect he'll be glad to see you folks."

"We aren't going to bother him," Jack said. "We brought our own sleeping bags. We're just going to help him stand off the Welfare sister. I brought my slingshot. Mama wouldn't let me bring my .22."

"Watch out for her glasses," the filling-station man advised solemnly. "Aim at her fanny instead. She's a fair target—about as wide as a whale, and come to think about it, she looks a little bit like one. No neck to speak of."

"Good-by," Mama said hurriedly as she waved them all back into the car. No need to encourage Jack like that, Amy could hear her thinking. And Jack hadn't

even told her, his favorite sister, that he had sneaked in the slingshot. Not even when she told him about the Ouija board.

"I'm Fate Sanders," the filling-station man called after them. "If you need any help at Mr. Will's, call me. Miles has a phone."

"Thanks," Mama called back. Amy and Jack waved as she drove off. Sally said thoughtfully, "I wonder how old that young writer is."

"Oh, he's bound to have a long gray beard, like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," Amy teased.

"I just hope he's not a hippie," Sally said. "I can do without the beard."

"Girls!" Jack snorted. "Girls are kooky too. Like grownups. Say, will you all call me Willie when we get there?"

"No," Sally said firmly.

"I see the road!" Amy said. "So that's what an oyster-shell road looks like. They crush the shells. I thought they'd be like cobblestones." It was a white road; the fine particles of crushed shell gleamed when the sunlight was on it, but gray shadows from the moss-hung trees dappled it, too; in places it was like twilight.

Jack reached out and caught a streamer of moss and pulled it into the car. "Look," he said, examining it. "It's not really gray—underneath it's kind of grayish-green.

Matter-of-fact, this piece is still alive. The dark-gray kind must be the dead kind."

"There's a sort of funny smell," Sally said. "But I guess I like it."

"It's the salt water and the marshes," Mama told her. "And maybe a whiff of a paper mill that I think they have here, too, as well as that seafood cannery. They give the wind a certain flavor, when it blows from their direction. But I like the—the atmosphere, too. Even the sulphur taste of the water is—interesting. And it's good to have cosmopolitan tastes, you know, and enjoy the differences of various places."

"That water at the filling station tasted like rotten eggs, to me," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, it smelled like them, too."

"But feel that sea breeze!" Mama urged. The tires crunched on the oyster shells.

"Hey, there's the pirates' inn!" Jack said.

"Just look at that!" Sally said with some awe.

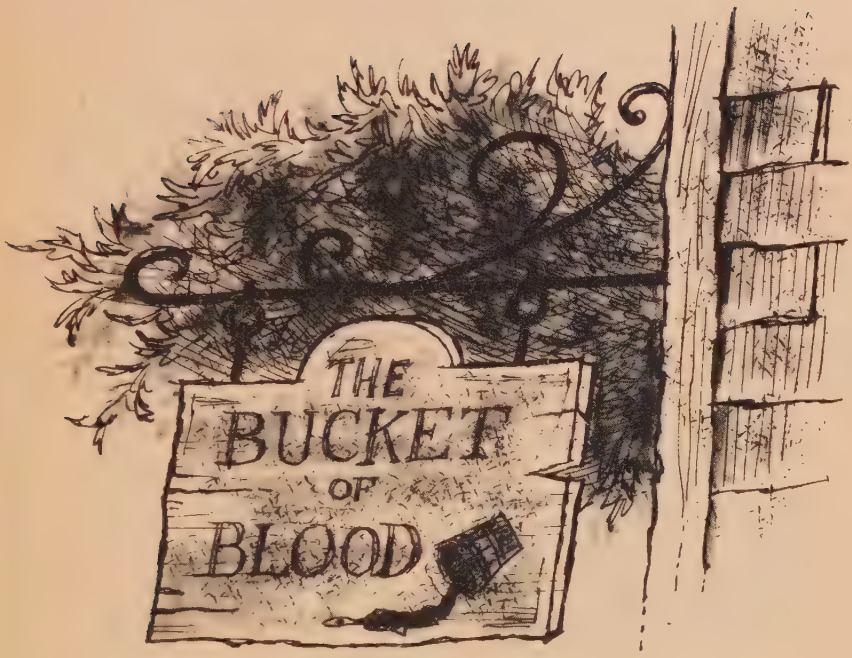
Amy was looking. Behind the two massive trees stood a gaunt, old two-storied house, as gray as the dead moss, as weather-beaten as the twisted scrub trees that slanted backward from the force of many years of sea winds on the bluff beyond. It had wooden window shutters that had once been painted blue and still showed a trace of the color.

"West-Indian-blue shutters!" Mama said, almost as excitedly as Jack, as if she could hardly believe it. "They used to paint windows and doors that color because they thought it would keep the evil spirits out."

Mama knew so many odd bits of interesting things, Amy thought wistfully, wishing she knew about things like that. Mama said all she had to do was to keep reading. But Amy thought it was taking a mighty long time for her to get to know about everything.

The house had grayed brick chimneys at both ends. "They look like tabby chimneys," Mama said, "but they may just be homemade bricks." A wide double door, also once blue, cut across the left corner of the front, with rotting steps and a narrow stoop, both set triangularly at the corner. Above the steps hung an ancient wooden inn sign, with its paint now darkened with age. It might once have been red. Jack read aloud, " 'The Bucket of Blood!' Wow!" as the car came to a stop. Sure enough, Amy could make out a primitive representation of an overturned pail.

All around the front, sides, and back of the house grew tangled masses of vines, shrubs, and flowers. Even in the shade of the oaks a good many of them were blooming. Amy had thought that all flowers needed sunshine; she wondered what all these shade-loving plants were. The only ones she recognized were oleanders and



crape myrtle, and wisteria that had finished blooming. The wrist-thick vines had strangled an old cedar tree to death.

"It looks like he hasn't even got plumbing," Mama said faintly. She was looking at the wooden outhouse at the edge of the side yard. It also was grayed to a lovely driftwood silver, and it was blossoming with pink flowers on the green vines that ran over it. "But he's got coral vines. And there are some blue hydrangeas—"

"No plumbing," Amy said. "No bathroom?"

THE
BUCKET
OF
BLOOD

"Pirates didn't need plumbing," Jack said. "They just—"

"Never mind," Sally said severely.

"We'll be camping out, all right," Amy said. "Neat!"

"Weird," Sally said.

"Well," Mama said finally, "let's go find Uncle Will."

"And Buster," Jack added. "Matter-of-fact, I always wanted a dog named Buster."

"I like Barkis better," Amy said as they piled out. "The one he had when Grandpa Durden was called Willie."

"Call me Willie, do," Jack coaxed. "Please, Amy? I'll pay you a quarter if you will. I've still got most of my allowance."

"No," Amy said. "It wouldn't do. You might confuse Uncle Will. Old people confuse easy. Besides, I don't need a quarter. I've got most of mine, too, and there's no place to buy anything."

"I wonder why he doesn't come out," Mama said a bit nervously. "He must have heard the car drive up."

"He thinks we're Welfare sisters," Sally said, and that broke up the whole family. They were still giggling when they knocked at the aged blue door. It had a leather thong for a latchstring, a thong that when pulled lifted a wooden bar to release a thin springy piece of wood that was the catch.

Jack tried it. "Neat," he said.

The door opened suddenly, and as they peered hesitantly into the dimness a voice croaked, "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!"

Footprints on the Stairs

"I don't believe it!" Sally said. "It's too weird. Uncle Will couldn't possibly have a parrot that says 'Pieces of eight.' "

"You're so right," an amiable, rather quavery voice said from inside. "I just do my parrot imitation when new guests come to The Bucket of Blood. I have a dog, and a few mice, and an occasional cockroach, and innumerable gnats and mosquitoes. But no parrot. At least, not a live one. There's a stuffed parrot named Cap'n Flint around here somewhere who, when he was alive, may have belonged to one of the pirates that came here a hundred and fifty years ago, but Cap'n Flint was moulting pretty badly so I—"

Mama broke in, "Uncle Will—I'm William Durden's daughter Ellen, and these are my children—Sally, Amy, Jack. We came because you wrote to my father—your nephew Willie—"

"He's dead," Jack said, "my grandpa named Willie.

But that's my second name. You can call me Willie if you want to."

"Hush up, Jack," Sally said. "Can't you see Uncle Will's got to get used to the idea of seeing all of us instead of—Willie?"

"Willie's girl! And grandchildren—of Willie's?" Uncle Will said. "Come in, all of you. But I can't believe he's—dead? How long ago? I do wish I'd—"

"Seventeen years ago," Mama said gently.

Amy was trying to focus on what Uncle Will looked like as he came forward out of the shadows. He was undoubtedly very old, but there was a kind of alertness in the way he cocked his head, and his eyes were still a bright blue, not faded out like Sara's grandmother's. There were small places of white stubble on his chin and jaw, as if he couldn't shave very closely because he couldn't see too well, but he didn't look neglected, to her, nor unable to take care of himself. The skin of his head showing through under the wispy white hair was pink and healthy. He walked a bit shakily, but the laces of his canvas shoes were tied. He was a clean, neat old man, Amy thought approvingly. His faded blue jeans and old blue shirt were clean too, though not ironed. Mama needn't hesitate to kiss him, Amy said to herself. Since Mama seemed shy about it, Amy decided to kiss him first. Relatives usually liked to be kissed.

Uncle Will didn't mind, though he seemed surprised. After Amy kissed him, Mama and Sally did too. Jack just said, "Where's Buster?"

"He's out in the back yard," Uncle Will said. "How'd you know about Buster?"

"Oh, I even know about Barkis," Jack bragged. "Grandpa told Mama when she was a little girl—all about what he and you used to do—and Mama told us. But it was Mr. Sanders at the filling station who told us Buster's name, and how he can catch fish and how he eats crabs."

"Well, he'll be glad to meet you," Uncle Will said. "You all make yourselves right at home now. You know, Jack, you look a lot like Willie. But you don't want me to call you Willie, not really. You don't want to be identified with somebody else. Each of us is an individ-

ual to be respected for himself, not because of somebody else. A long time ago, my boy used to be Willie. Now Jack's the boy Buster and I want to take fishing."

Amy could see Jack swelling up with pride. " 'William Mr. Trimbletoe, he's a good fisherman,' " she quoted.

Uncle Will nodded at her. "I used to be," he said.

"Then you did mean yourself—when you wrote down Mr. Trimbletoe?" she asked.

"I suppose so. But—"

"We're going to help you find your money and diamond, like you asked Grandpa to," Amy said. "We're going to figure out the clues from the rhyme." She looked around the long room for the first time. It was crowded with all sorts of interesting things. Surely everything mentioned in the rhyme must be here, she thought, someplace. (There was the clock—and it was a cuckoo clock! And it had run down!) There was hardly room to turn around, or to walk across to the other door.

"That's fine," Uncle Will said. "I hope you can. I hid them so well, you know, that I can't find them myself. You pretty good at puzzles, are you, Amy?"

"I'm very good at them," she promised. "All of us are. But you have to help us. Okay?"

"Okay," Uncle Will said, smiling. "But right now I'm taking anybody who wants to go, out in the back yard to meet Buster—Why didn't your papa come too?"

"He had to go to New York on business," Amy explained. "He's Farnum of Farnum and Smithson, you know. They have a lot of business in New York."

Mama asked Uncle Will, "May I bring in our things? Do you have room for us to put sleeping bags and a cot we brought?"

"Plenty of room, dear Ellen," he answered, waving a hand expansively at the overcrowded room. "Anywhere here you like. Or of course, you could sleep upstairs." There was a staircase at the side of the room. "But be careful," he warned. "I've heard noises—somebody may be hiding up there. I hardly ever go up because I can't climb stairs very well any more." He put his hand on Jack's shoulder and opened the door into what looked to Amy like a store room—though it was hardly any more crowded than the one they were in. "The back door is right here," he said to Jack. "Come on through the kitchen. You girls come too, when you get ready." They went out, Jack chattering, Uncle Will nodding agreement.

Sally and Amy looked at each other and then at the room. Both fireplaces, one at each end, held burned

fragments of driftwood logs. An overstuffed ragged easy chair was in front of one; a sofa, also ragged and overstuffed, was in front of the other. It had a pillow and a rumpled blanket on it; probably it was where Uncle Will slept, Amy surmised. But in the corner was a pallet made of old quilts, with another blanket and pillow. Sally saw her puzzled glance. "Maybe he's got schizophrenia," she murmured.

"You mean insomnia?" Amy said doubtfully.

"No. Schizophrenia," Sally explained kindly, "is a mental thing where you have a split personality. It was a joke, silly. J-o-k-e."

"I don't think it's so funny," Amy said.

Mama called from outside, "Come and help me unload."

"In a minute, Mama," Sally called back. "Look, Amy! A cuckoo clock! 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest.' Could you call that little door up there the cuckoo's nest?"

"Only it was 'two gooses' nest' in Uncle Will's version," Amy reminded her.

"Well, there was the clock that ran down," Sally said. "This one's not running."

"I already noticed that," Amy said. "It should be the clock in the rhyme, all right."

"There's a net on the wall. I guess it's a shrimp net. Looks terribly nautical, doesn't it?"

"And look in this other old room. The kitchen, he said! What are those iron things on the hearth?" There was a big old fireplace in the kitchen, too, with the gray brick chimney place against the outside wall.

"They're some kind of flatirons, that's what they are. No wonder he wears his shirts unironed. He just couldn't have tried to heat those at the fire and iron with them!" Sally exclaimed. "But that's the way the pioneers ironed all their clothes, I think. And they actually had ruffles on their dresses and sunbonnets sometimes."

Amy was standing by the cast-iron sink, where a hand pump came up through a plank drainboard. She had no idea how water came from this, though she guessed that was what it was for. "Sally," she said, fascinated, looking at some pieces of knotted cord on the drainboard, "do you s'pose Uncle Will washes dishes with pieces of old shrimp nets?"

"I don't think he washes dishes at all," Sally said, nodding at the dirty plates and cups and saucers in the sink. "Something tells me we're elected, Amy."

Amy sighed. "Oh, well, I don't really mind washing dishes," she said. "Except—where's the hot water?"

"There's the stove, with something steaming in a kettle on it," Sally pointed out. "Could be hot water. It looks like the kind of old-fashioned iron stove I've seen in pioneer movies. Yes, that's the hot water, all right."

"How do we take baths?" Amy asked.

"In the ocean!" Sally said. "Lucky we've got plenty of ocean handy."

"I could use a new swimsuit."

"Nobody'll see us. Unless Miles Cameron—"

"Look at all these things on the shelves, Sally. Half a dozen baskets with stuff in them—and there's the rest of his dishes, the ones that aren't dirty. And some figurines and things—"

"And a lot of pipes in that old basket. He couldn't smoke all of those—"

"And books—he must have a million books. All mildewed."

Facing the inn's entrance, almost against the opposite wall, was a long counter made of worn planks, rugged and scarred with age and use.

"It's the bar where the pirates drank their grog," Sally guessed.

"Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!" Amy sang.

"Amy—Sally!" It was Jack's voice from the back yard.

"Amy—Sally!" Mama called from the front yard.

The girls looked toward the back door, then shrugged at each other resignedly and went to help Mama first. "Come on and help!" Amy called to Jack. "Then we can all play with Buster."

Jack came running around the corner of the house,

with the black-and-white dog frisking around him. "Look—he likes me!" he bragged.

"Grab the other end of this cot," Amy told him. "Buster'll wait. He's not going anywhere."

They maneuvered the cot between the odds and ends in the barroom, to the foot of the staircase. Amy had turned around, her hands behind her holding the edge of the cot so as to walk facing forward, and started up the rickety steps, when she stopped so suddenly that Jack at the other end nearly fell backward.

"Hey! What's the idea?"

"Look!" Amy said, pointing at the step she had been about to put her foot on.

"What?" Jack dropped his end of the cot and moved up beside her. "They're dusty, but what'd you expect? 'Spect Buster to dust 'em with his tail every day?"

"Footprints!" Amy said. "Don't you see—?"

"Well, so somebody stepped in the dust—No! I see what you mean—"

Amy said in a voice that tried not to sound as scared as she was, "It's a footprint—on each step—and they're all—"

"Matter-of-fact," Jack said with bravado, "they're all going up and—"

"None coming down!" Amy stared, frozen. Their mother and Sally came in just then with the suitcases.

"Go on up," Sally said impatiently. "What's with you two?"

"Not me," Jack said. "Not till I get Buster and my slingshot. I told you I should have brought my .22, Mom."

"Look at that!" Amy grabbed Mama and pointed.

Sally got it before Mama did. "Somebody went up there," she said, "and—"

"And didn't come down!"

Mama said slowly, "Then Uncle Will was right. He did hear someone up there. And whoever it was—is still there." She leaned forward to examine the footprints. They were not very clear, but appeared to be made by a fairly large shoe. "A man—"

"Or a big boy. Jack's shoes are nearly that big."

"Should we call Uncle Will?"

"Not yet," Mama said. "He couldn't help any if—"

Sally said hardily, "I think the four of us could handle any one man, don't you?"

A voice they hadn't heard before came from the open door. "Well, five of us could, anyhow."

They all turned. It was a tall young man, tanned as if he had been on the beach a lot. He had dark brown hair and eyes almost the same color. He was wearing dungarees and a white T-shirt. Amy could see Sally's cheeks turning pink; so she knew Sally thought he was good-looking. Well, maybe he was, but that was no

reason to look the way Sally was looking, sort of breathless. And no reason not to speak. Amy hadn't lost her voice just because the guy looked a little bit like a TV star. Just as Jack said, "Hi!" she said, "You must be Miles Cameron—" and her mother said, "There's somebody up there—"

"Hi," he answered Jack, and said "Yes, I'm Miles," to Amy, and "I'll take a look," to their mother, and "Hello," to Sally. She was able to say "Hello" back, Amy was glad to see. She hadn't swooned or anything, even if the way he looked, so easy and self-assured, did make those clowns Pete and Timmy that Sally ran around with back home seem mighty young.

"We're Uncle Will's family," Jack said. "This is my mother, Mrs. Farnum, and my sisters, Sally and Amy. I'm Jack."

"I'm glad Mr. Will has a family," Miles said. "Mr. Sanders told me about you-all. Well, what makes you think there's somebody upstairs?"

"Look!" Amy showed him the footprints in the dust.

"You're right." His voice quickened with interest. "Now, kids, you stay here and catch him when I throw him down, will you? I ought to have some kind of a weapon, I guess—" He saw an old frog-gig hanging on the wall, and took it down, hefting it in his hand. "This ought to do."

"What is it?" Jack said.

"A fish spear or a frog-gig," Miles said. "I think. Or if we were in New England I'd say it might be a harpoon." He started up the steps.

"I'll go with you," Mama said bravely.

"It might be better if you stayed here with the children, Mrs. Farnum."

Jack said, "I'll go with him. Wait till I get my slingshot. And Buster. He's a good police dog."

"Buster's a good dog," Miles corrected, "but I hardly think he'd be much help as a police dog. He's too good a tail-wagger. He likes everybody. He can't even bluff a fiddler crab. He chases sandpipers on the beach, but he wouldn't know what to do if he ever caught one. Even the most desperate criminal could pat Buster and make friends."

"You stay right here," Mama ordered Jack, catching him by the arm. Miles nodded, and started upstairs, spear in hand. They held their breaths while he opened a door at the head of the stairs and disappeared. They could hear him walking around overhead, and doors opening and closing, but nothing else. No voices, no shouts, no scuffles.

Then Miles reappeared at the head of the stairs. "You can come on up," he said in an odd voice. "There's nobody up here."

"But—" Mama's voice was puzzled, "there's got to be—"

"The footprints—" Sally said, hardly breathing.

"They don't come down!" Amy whispered. "Do—do ghosts leave footprints?"

Miss Dibble Threatens

They all rushed up the stairs, leaving the cot and suitcases at the foot, obscuring the footprints in the dust. Afterward Amy was sorry they hadn't saved one at least—to measure the suspect's shoes against, if they ever caught any suspects.

At first glance the upstairs seemed full of small vacant rooms, all opening into a hall in the center, at the head of the stairs. The group went from room to room, as Miles already had, opening every closet. All empty. The upstairs room at each end of the house had a fireplace in it, built into the same chimney that served each of the two fireplaces downstairs in the barroom. Another narrow stair led to a squnched-up slope-walled attic, bare, without windows. There was, oddly, no dust on these treads. Somebody must have thought of wiping them, Amy figured, but forgot to dust the others.

Miles said, "You see? Nobody anywhere at all. I don't see how he got out, but—"

"Windows?" Mama suggested. "No—it's a tall house. Anybody jumping out of these windows would have broken a leg at least." The outside walls of the house were straight up-and-down walls—no wings with roofs. There wasn't a window at all above the entrance, where the inn sign on the portico shelter might have let someone climb down if there had been an exit. Though there were plenty of trees beyond, the two ancient, large live oaks that were closest to the house had no limbs near enough to be used for climbing down.

"Hey!" Jack had a thought. "What about that secret passage where the pirates shanghaied the men who got drunk at the bar?"

"It opens from behind the bar downstairs," Miles told him. "Mr. Will showed it to me. It doesn't come up here."

"Well," Mama said doubtfully, "I guess it's safe to bring the cot and sleeping bags up. I guess maybe it'll be safe to sleep here. I hope. Whoever it was is gone now. Somehow."

"I'm not scared," Jack said.

"I am," Amy admitted, hugging her arms and shivering. "And you ought to have enough sense to be scared. I think it's a ghost."

"A pirate ghost!" Jack seized on the idea with relish. "Somebody with a black beard who walked the plank a hundred years ago and drowned and comes back at

midnight dripping seaweed and has a ghost drink at the bar downstairs and then goes upstairs to sleep—with his ghost parrot on his shoulder—"

Amy shuddered; she could just see that ghost, the way Jack described him.

"It really is weird," Sally said. She hadn't been doing much talking, Amy noticed, but she hadn't missed a thing Miles Cameron did or said.

"Let's try to get that old pirate on the Ouija board tonight," Jack proposed. "Maybe he'll tell us all about The Bucket of Blood the way it was in the old days."

"No!" Amy said. "It's my Ouija and I'm not going to have any real ghosts using it."

"Downstairs and get the things, children," Mama said. It took no time at all, with Miles bringing Mama's and Sally's share. "I think we'd better all sleep in one room," Mama said. "And you might leave that—that spear thing up here too," she told Miles.

"Ho!" Jack said. "It wouldn't be any good to kill a pirate ghost with. Matter-of-fact, it'd go right through him and he'd just laugh."

After Amy found a bedraggled mop in the kitchen and wiped up some of the dust, they placed the cot in the largest room with a fireplace, and arranged the sleeping bags around it.

"All shipshape," Miles said. Then he said to Amy, while smiling at Sally, "If you get really scared tonight,

let me know tomorrow and I'll sleep here tomorrow night."

"Why not tonight?" Amy urged hopefully.

"Well, we'll see. Let's see what Mr. Will says about those footprints. Where is he, anyway?"

They found Uncle Will in the back room downstairs, making a chowder on the iron stove. He thought it was kind of curious, all right, about the footprints that went upstairs and didn't come down. "But you didn't know about the other stairs," he told them.

"We didn't see any other stairs."

"There's a back staircase that comes out here in the old inn kitchen." He opened a door at the opposite end from the back door, and showed them a narrow tumbledown staircase—a very cramped staircase—going up between two walls. Some of the steps were broken; it looked very unsafe. "Its other end is in the hall upstairs. I think you missed it because there's no handle on the door, and the boards all look alike, the wall and the door, from the side you were on. It's not really a secret staircase—just sort of hidden away out of sight."

"Then that's how he came down and got out?" Mama sounded a good bit relieved, to be sure that he could have got away.

"Could be." Uncle Will was about to shut the door again on the narrow stairs, when Sally said slowly, "Wait a minute—"

"You're right!" Amy caught on. "There are no footprints in this dust!" She reached out a finger and wrote *NO* in the dust on the small lowest step, then wiped her finger on her blue shorts.

"That's funny," Miles agreed. "He's still up there, then, if—"

"Did you look in all the closets?" Uncle Will asked. "There are plenty of odd little rooms where body servants going along with travelers used to sleep when this was an inn."

"Pirates didn't have servants, did they?" Jack asked.

"That was after the pirates' time," Uncle Will said. "Shipowners had body servants; lots of rich men did. And some of the rooms were partitioned off while it was an inn, so as to make more rooms to rent privately. Some of those are as small as closets, without even any windows. An innkeeper could make more money, the more rooms he had to rent. At various times other rooms were built onto the original inn, and the walls double-studded, so there's a space between the old outside wall and the new wall. In one place in what used to be the outside wall, there's an inside window where you can look straight down a shaft to the floor. The inn had a sort of uneven floor plan, too; there are rooms lower and higher than some of the ones they open out of, with a step or two up or down. Some of the floors are falling in; so be careful. And there's an attic."

"We found it. Nobody was in it."

"We didn't see all those little rooms going up and down, and the inside-outside window, though," Sally said.

"They're between the bigger rooms," Uncle Will told her. "You probably assumed the larger rooms and their closets were all there were. But beyond the closet often there was another small passage between the walls. A rabbit-warren kind of upstairs."

"We'll look again," Miles assured Sally.

"Here, eat lunch first," Uncle Will said. "If anybody's up there he'll wait. He can't get down without our seeing him, at least if he uses the stairs." They could indeed see through the door into the barroom, from the kitchen. And the chowder smelled good, Amy thought—as though Uncle Will had put crabs and fish and potatoes and milk and onions and butter all in a big pot and boiled them down to a thick stew. Turned out that was exactly the way to make a chowder. He gave them each a bowl of it and a spoon and some crackers, and they sat down around the long, pine-plank table after they had cleared a lot of stuff from it and the chairs, and ate.

" 'Catches fishes, puts them in dishes,' " Amy murmured to Jack. "This is fishes in dishes."

"So what?" Jack said. "I don't see that that helps much."

"What's that?" Miles asked.

"May we tell him, Uncle Will?" Sally asked.

"I think it would be all right," the old man said. "Miles is a good friend."

The three told him, their sentences running into each other, about the clues and the money and the diamond. Miles didn't look too happy about the whole thing, though, Amy thought when his dark brows drew together and his voice turned serious. "Just how many people," he asked Uncle Will, "knew about this money and—and diamond?"

"Why, nobody," Uncle Will said. "Nobody at all knew about the diamond. And Miss Dibble doesn't believe I have any money," he added with gentle scorn. "I told her I have plenty to take care of myself, but she thinks I'm destitute. She offered to let me deed my property to the county, though, and let the county take care of me the rest of my life. I'm not about to do it, of course."

"But who else knew?" Miles persisted. "You people here—"

"Uncle Will wrote to our grandpa and told him," Jack explained. "But he's dead, so we came instead, to help Uncle Will find the money and diamond."

"Nobody else," Uncle Will assured Miles.

"Wait a minute. Where'd the money come from? Somebody knew you had it, if—"

"I sold some property I owned in North Georgia, last year," Uncle Will said. "Got three thousand five hundred dollars for it. A fellow I used to know a long time ago bought it. He traced me here because his land adjoined mine and he wanted it. Yes, of course Frank Ledbetter knew I had that much money. But he wouldn't be trying to—"

"You didn't put it in the bank? Maybe he decided to steal it back," Miles said gravely.

"No," Uncle Will said certainly. "Frank Ledbetter wouldn't do a thing like that. But I do wish I'd put it in the bank. Hindsight never does any good, though, does it?"

"If it wasn't old Frank Ledbetter, it had to be a ghost," Jack said hopefully. "A pirate ghost." A few minutes later Amy heard him change his mind with a shout. He had gone out back, and now he was yelling, "Got him! Got him! Help me, somebody—Miles—Amy! Uncle Will! Buster!"

"Now he's gone and done it," Uncle Will said.

Nobody heard him but Mama and Amy. The others had rushed to the back yard, and they followed. There in the door of the outhouse Jack was struggling with somebody—somebody who broke past him and headed for the shelter of the palmetto and scrub grove beyond.

Miles was faster; he caught the fugitive and brought him back, kicking and fighting furiously, and held him

with his arms pinioned behind his back so the others could look him over.

He was about sixteen, a boy with tangled, longish dark-red hair and wild fox-brown eyes, a scrawny kid in ragged jeans and a torn, dirty shirt. He was breathing hard, jerking against Miles's firm hands, trying to get loose again.

"No use, Hop," Uncle Will said soothingly. "Stop fighting and he'll let you go. Eh, Miles?"

"I don't know about that. You know him, Mr. Will? What was he doing hiding in your outhouse?"

"I reckon," Uncle Will said mildly, "he was hoping nobody would go out there. He didn't know, of course, that The Bucket of Blood is in business again, with guests staying awhile."

"Where did the boy come from?" Mama said.

"How'd you get down from upstairs?" Jack asked him. "We couldn't see how anybody could get down without leaving tracks."

The boy didn't answer. Miles still held him, but when he stopped struggling, Miles released him except for one hand holding his skinny arm.

"Can't you talk?" Jack asked.

"He's not the one who was upstairs," Amy said. "He's barefooted. The ghost wore shoes. And they were bigger than this one's feet."

Uncle Will said seriously, "You mustn't tell anybody

that Hop is here. He's a fugitive from Miss Dibble, too."

"We won't." Jack was quick to promise. "If you want us to, we'll cut our fingers and sign a pact in blood."

"Later," Uncle Will said, as if he considered the suggestion an excellent one.

"What do you mean, a fugitive, Uncle Will?" Mama asked.

Miles said, "I never saw him here before, Mr. Will. How long has he been around?"

"Oh, a day or two," Uncle Will answered him. Amy guessed he was being purposely vague; he didn't want to tell them too much about Hop. She felt sorry for the boy; he had a rag around his ankle as if it had been hurt or sprained or something.

"What's the matter with your foot?" she asked him. He still wasn't talking.

Uncle Will said, "Hop hurt his ankle jumping out of a car. Some young hoodlums held up a filling station and made him go along with them. He didn't want to help them rob anybody, and they had a pistol and he was afraid somebody would get killed. Sure enough, he found out later when he got hold of a newspaper that they did kill a man, and the police were looking for the boy who jumped out of the car. I found him hiding in the scrub—he couldn't get far on his hurt ankle. He's

been staying here with me. But of course he hides when anybody comes around. Especially Miss Dibble."

"We could disguise him," Jack said. "He could maybe wear some of Sally's clothes and be a girl—"

Hop spoke for the first time, a quick exclamation. "Girls' clothes!" Amy could tell he didn't go along with that idea.

"What's your name?" Miles said to him. "Do you want to be called Hop?"

"Yeah, I want to," the boy said defiantly.

"His name's Turner Hopkins, he told me," Uncle Will said. "I just call him Hop because he needs a nickname. Some folks don't need nicknames—you-all, for instance, don't—but I have an idea Hop does."

Amy thought she saw what he meant. She held out her hand to the boy. "Let's be friends," she said. "We won't tell Miss Dibble or anybody."

Miles let go of his arm. "Shake hands with her," he advised. Hop just stood there, his glance warily moving from one to the other, sort of like a cat when it didn't trust people. Amy could almost see the twitching tail.

"Maybe he doesn't know how," Jack said. "See, like this, Hop—" He grabbed the other boy's hand and shook it. Hop grinned just a little, but distrustfully. "Now, shake hands with Amy," Jack urged.

"What about his parents?" Mama asked Uncle Will.

"Aren't they worrying about him? Maybe you should let Miss Dibble take him back to them?"

"He hasn't got any parents," Uncle Will said. "He was living in one of those foster homes where the county put him. He hated it. I'm not about to make him go back there. You see, Buster likes him," he added as if that made his decision the only right one.

"I do too," Amy said. She figured she would probably have to draw back her hand if he didn't take it soon.

"You just like him because he's got red hair and more freckles than you have," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, I like him too," he added generously. He took Hop's reluctant hand and thrust it into Amy's. "There!"

"Hop, there's plenty of chowder left," Uncle Will said. "You must be hungry. Come on and eat."

"I'll have some more with him," Jack said. "So he won't have to eat by himself. Want some more, Amy?"

Amy went along, though she didn't actually want anything else to eat. She was wondering if she felt more friendly toward the strange boy because he had red hair and freckles, too. That might be it—it really might, she decided.

Through the open door she could see Miles talking seriously with Uncle Will, and Mama and Sally joining in. Miles went in, then, and up the stairs. Sally stood at

the foot anxiously waiting for him to come down. Amy couldn't wait to ask her, "What were you-all talking about, out there?"

"Sh-sh-sh—" Sally glanced through the door into the kitchen where Jack and Hop still sat at the table. "Miles was telling Uncle Will not to let Hop know about the money and diamond, that's all. But Uncle Will said he trusted Hop—in fact he's already letting him help hunt for it. But Hop wasn't very good at puzzles. Miles said that was fortunate. He thinks Hop might find it and not let Uncle Will know. He says, after all, Uncle Will doesn't know a thing about the boy but what he himself says. Uncle Will says that's enough—because old Buster likes Hop. He thinks that dog is a good judge of human nature."

"What's Miles doing now?"

"Looking for those little rooms and passages between the walls, that Uncle Will was talking about. To see if anybody is still hiding upstairs. I wanted to go up too, but Miles didn't want me to get hurt in case he found somebody."

"Well, you don't have to act so satisfied about it!" Amy said, kidding. "You trying to be something fragile and precious to him? If he knew you better, my dear big sister, he wouldn't be thinking you'll break or something."

"Sh-sh-sh—He'll hear you," Sally said.

Miles came back down the stairs. "I found the other end of the kitchen staircase," he reported, "and some of the little spaces between the old double-studded walls and the newer walls. But I couldn't find anybody in any of them. There must be another way out—maybe one that even Mr. Will never found," he said. "But since we can't be sure whoever it was isn't still hiding somewhere, I think I had better sleep here tonight after all. I've got a sleeping bag too. We'll have a regular campout." He smiled at Amy.

"Oh, good!" she said. She had been more afraid than the others, she realized, but she considered that meant she had more sense than they had about danger.

Sally said, "That's sweet of you, Miles." She was turning pink again, Amy noticed with interest. She thought, I wonder if I could learn to blush if I practiced. But I don't really want to. I kind of think it's better to shake hands when you meet a boy.

Jack came in, pulling Hop by the arm. "He's been looking for Uncle Will's money and diamond too," he told the others. "Uncle Will said he could. No, he hasn't found anything yet."

"Are there any chickens?" Amy asked.

"A few. Uncle Will keeps them to lay eggs, he says. He doesn't like to kill them—they're sort of like pets—so he doesn't ever have fried chicken."

"Any pens?"

"Just a little old chicken house. You might call it a pen, I guess, if you want to stretch a point."

"You and Hop could be hunting there, while Sally and I wash the dishes."

"I was going to ask Mom if we could go swimming." Hop seemed to be going along with Jack without giving him any more trouble, Amy was glad to see. They had evidently been talking, too. She didn't want to suspect Hop the way Miles did—but there was still some small doubt behind her wish to think the best of him. "Well, if you'd wait till we get these dishes done, Sally and I could come too. Maybe—" she said with an impish sidewise glance at Sally, "Miles will show us the best place for swimming."

Miles, who had sat down at the kitchen table while Sally cleared it, said, "Sure. Come on down to my place and swim there. Everybody can swim, I hope?"

"Of course we can," Jack said. "We've all been to camp and learned how, years ago."

"How about you, Hop?" Miles said. "Can you swim?"

"Sure I can," Hop muttered. Amy just knew he was lying, the poor kid. He couldn't go to camp, probably. We'll have to watch out for him, she decided, while he's in the water.

Miles must have thought the same thing, because he

said, "You know, you can't do too much real swimming, in the surf. The waves get too rough. And if you go out beyond the breakers, where it's smooth, you might get caught in the undertow. So the best place to swim, actually, is a creek that runs into the Sound right at my shack. There's a beach, but it's calm water, and not too deep. I've got an old boat you can hang onto and jump from. If you dive, though, you have to be sure it's high tide or you'll hit bottom."

Hop looked relieved.

Mama and Uncle Will came in, and Jack said, "Can we go swimming with Miles down at his place, Mama?"

Before she could answer, Uncle Will, who was looking out the door, exclaimed, "You better hide, Hop! Here comes Miss Dibble."

"Upstairs!" Jack said. He and Hop ran for the stairs, and Amy knew they'd be hiding just out of sight on the landing, leaning over the banister to try to see and hear what went on below. She hoped they didn't fall head first onto Miss Dibble, and giggled at her mental picture of that interesting accident. Miss Dibble would make a pretty good target, she thought as a very stout lady climbed with surprising energy out of a small foreign car that looked as if she had bought it to fit her exactly but it had shrunk in the wash. Amy giggled again.

Miss Dibble came in without knocking, calling, "Mr.

Durden!" as if Uncle Will were deaf and couldn't hear a knock at the door. Uncle Will muttered furiously, "Why can't people leave other people alone?" Buster growled, and then barked with a certain menace.

Miss Dibble flourished a furled umbrella at Buster. The sun was shining very brightly outside; so Amy suspected she carried it just to use as a weapon in case animals should resent her approach—as they probably always did. Buster sure was resenting it.

"Mr. Durden! Call off your dog!" Miss Dibble said imperatively. The old inn was the darker inside because of the sunlight outdoors; she didn't see the others, at first. "I've come to take you to the Golden Age Haven. Today. Now don't you do a thing—I'll do everything for you. Your room is waiting, and there's a very nice old gentleman to room with you, a Mr. Abercrombie, who hasn't got a thing wrong with him except he can't see very well and he's a teensy bit deaf. Remember our slogan, the Three Gs. It's Great to be a Grand old man in the Golden Age Haven. Isn't that a nice slogan, Mr. Durden?"

The Dishrag Clue and the Hens in Pens

"Thank you all the same," Uncle Will said—politely, though Amy knew he was having a hard time keeping himself from growling at her like Buster, "but I don't believe I'll go, Miss Dribble. Not today—nor any other time." He winked at Jack when he said "Miss Dribble."

"So let's get you ready," Miss Dibble went on as if he hadn't spoken.

Then her eyes got accustomed to the comparative dimness and she could see Mama and Miles and the girls. "Well! You have company, Mr. Durden? Relatives—I hope?"

"This is my grandniece, Mrs. Farnum, Miss Dribble," Uncle Will said, introducing them. "And my great-grandnieces, Sally and Amy. I believe you know Miles Cameron."

"Now weren't you a naughty boy, Mr. Durden," Miss Dibble said, "not to tell me you had a grandniece?" Then she said to Mama with brisk emphasis, "I'm very

glad to see you, Mrs. Farnum. Judge Arkwright was just a weensy bit reluctant to make Mr. Durden a ward of the court; he'd really prefer some relative to sign the papers before the dear old fellow comes to the Golden Age Haven."

"How do you do, Miss Dibble," Mama said calmly.

"So let's get him ready," Miss Dibble said. "You do agree he'd be better off living where someone can look after him?"

"Your Golden Age Haven doesn't seem to be quite the answer," Mama said gently, "in Uncle Will's case. I'm sure it's a lovely home—for the other Golden Age people who like lovely homes. For anybody else but Uncle Will, in fact. He's an individualist, Miss Dibble. He wouldn't be happy in the very finest home for the aged. He likes his own place best."

"But it—it's such a mess!" gasped Miss Dibble, plainly surprised that Mama didn't instantly agree with her and start packing Uncle Will.

"Such a mess," Mama agreed serenely. "Just the way he likes it. Do you think the Golden Age Haven would allow him to bring all his things, Miss Dibble—all these things he needs in order to live happily ever after?" She waved a hand at the crowded room.

"Only his clothes," Miss Dibble said faintly. "I'll help him pack his clothes—and perhaps his Bible or—?"

"Never mind," Mama said. "He's not going anywhere."

"Do you plan to take care of him yourself, Mrs. Farnum?"

"Now let's get this straight—nobody's going to 'take care' of Buster and me!" Uncle Will's voice was shaky and he suddenly sat down in the big ragged chair and held Buster against his knee with hands that were not very steady either. But he went on, "I'll thank you to go and take care of somebody else. There must be plenty of people who need somebody like you." Then he muttered under his breath, "But I can't think of a soul right now."

Mama maneuvered Miss Dibble toward the door. "I hope it won't be necessary to make any decisions for Uncle Will for a good many years yet," she said. "I'm here to help him in any way I can, of course. But so far he seems pretty self-sufficient, to me."

"He hasn't any money," Miss Dibble said. "He might get sick."

"He might die," Mama agreed. "But I think he'd rather die tomorrow, here by himself where he wants to be, than ten years from now in the Golden Age Haven. What would you be saving him for?" she asked. "To live a long time—just to be miserable?"

"It's my duty to see that he's taken care of," Miss

Dibble said. "That's my job, Mrs. Farnum. If you go back to your home and leave him here alone, Judge Arkwright will have to act."

"It's a free country," Uncle Will said to her. "Didn't you ever hear of the Bill of Rights, Miss Dribble? Show me where it says you can take a man out of his own home for his own good. I'm not breaking any laws."

"I suspect there's a sanitary ordinance that would cover this—this place." Miss Dibble sniffed. "If I have to, I'll see about that. You don't have the money to put in plumbing, of course."

"How do you know what I have?" Uncle Will said mildly.

"And what about his delusion that someone is hiding here?" Miss Dibble demanded of Mama. "He's not responsible, you see—he's senile and he needs taking care of."

"Perhaps he's right," Mama said. "Somebody might be hiding here. We intend to find out, of course. Good-by, Miss Dibble."

"You haven't seen the last of me," Miss Dibble warned. "You must know, Mrs. Farnum, that I have only Mr. Durden's best interests at heart. I couldn't sleep at night if he were out here alone when you people leave—and not in his right mind either—with no one to protect him."

Then Uncle Will let Buster go, and Buster began showing her who'd protect him, Amy thought gleefully. He nipped at Miss Dibble's heels, barking and growling, as she scurried out the door, calling back undiscouraged to Uncle Will, "Remember the Three Gs, Mr. Durden! It's Great to be a Grand old man in the Golden Age Haven!"

Jack tiptoed with exaggerated caution downstairs, followed by Hop, as Miss Dibble squeezed her bulk into the small car and started off. "She needs a shoehorn to get in that car and a can opener to get out of it," Jack said. "Buster, you were great!" He patted and praised

Buster extravagantly. "Good dog! You know how to get rid of her, don't you, good dog?"

Uncle Will said with satisfaction, "She doesn't even suspect Hop's here. That judge doesn't either."

"Hey," Jack said, "we heard something while we were upstairs. Like somebody behind one of the walls maybe. Didn't we, Hop?"

"I don't reckon it was anybody," Hop muttered. "Probably a rat or something."

"A rat!" Sally gasped.

"Sally'd rather have a murderer in the house than a rat," Jack said happily.

"I can't possibly sleep where there might be rats," Sally said certainly.

"I don't believe there are any," Uncle Will told her. "Buster takes care of them."

"Is he a rat terrier?" Jack wanted to know.

"Once removed," Uncle Will said. "I think."

Mama said to Miles, "You don't suppose Miss Dibble would really cause Uncle Will trouble about some sanitary ordinance, do you?"

"She sure sounds like she's going to try," Miles said. "I never did understand people like her. I know they mean well, and probably they help a lot of people, but they do seem to go out of their way sometimes to try to help the wrong ones, don't they?"

"So we'd better hurry up and find Uncle Will's

money and diamond," Amy said practically. "Then if she fusses about his not having any plumbing, he can just build a bathroom."

"And get a manservant to take care of him," Sally reminded her.

"One that Buster likes," Jack offered. "Hey, when are we going swimming? Miles said we could go down at his place, Mom. Okay?"

Mama looked at Sally, and Sally nodded. "Well, yes, Jack, but wait until the girls finish the dishes so they can go too."

"Okay," Jack said amiably. "Come on, Hop. We'll go investigate that chicken house while we wait." They raced each other to the door.

"Uncle Will, have you got any other dishcloths or dish towels?" Sally asked him. He had shown them how to pump water into a pan, and Amy was rushing through the dishwashing using the bits of old shrimp net, but Sally was more fastidious about drying them.

"Well, now that I've got me some girls to help, I'll have to find some, won't I?" Uncle Will said. "Let's see—" He went to a cupboard in the corner of the kitchen and rummaged in the drawer. "I think there used to be some dish towels here someplace," he murmured, pulling all sorts of things out of the drawer. Amy noticed a ball of fishing cord and some odds and ends of metal things and a hammer and a quill pen and some

shells and some old socks and a strange-looking ugly thing somewhat like a very large dried-seed-pod—but no dish towels. "Why, maybe this will do," Uncle Will said, holding the old dried thing out toward Sally.

"What is it?" Sally said, not touching it.

Amy took it, fascinated. She had never seen anything like it before.

"Why, it's a dishrag gourd," Uncle Will said, in the voice of an uncle delighted to have found exactly what his nieces wanted.

"Are those socks in the drawer clean?" Sally asked in some desperation. "Or maybe you have an old clean undershirt, Uncle Will? I don't believe I can dry dishes with that—that thing. Though I'm sure it's a fine specimen of—of dishrag gourd," she added so as not to disappoint him.

"You've never seen a dishrag gourd before, I reckon," Uncle Will said. "The pioneers grew them just specially to use for dishwashing—"

"In the olden days?" Amy said.

"Yes, in the olden days." Uncle Will smiled gently. "They didn't have any cloth to spare for dishrags, then —they had to spin and weave every bit of their cloth, unless they had lots of money to buy scarce and expensive stuffs from abroad. You see, a dishrag gourd will clean the dishes and even the pots, just as well as scrapers and such that you can buy at the store. The fibers are

tough, and they last a good while. An old man who lives up on the St. Anne gave me that one—he grew them as a curiosity. The other name for the vine is climbing okra. It has seeds inside that look like okra seeds, but after you split the divisions in the gourd and take the dried seeds out, you use the inside fibers for your dish-washing. I never used it, though, because I had plenty of pieces of old nets that would do."

"I guess I'll just let the dishes drain dry here in this pan," Sally decided.

Amy said, "Can I split the dishrag gourd, Uncle Will? And take out the seeds?"

"Why, yes, Amy. And we'll plant them in the yard and grow more dishrags," Uncle Will said. "I don't know why I didn't do that before. Just stuck it in the drawer and forgot it, I reckon."

Amy reached for a knife. She turned the giant dried-seed-pod around, trying to find the best place to cut into it. "That's funny," she said. "It looks like—yes—somebody's already cut into this one, Uncle Will. See that slit there—it looks like it was made with a knife."

"Did I? Now I wonder if—" Uncle Will seemed to be trying to remember.

Amy gasped excitedly. "Sally! It's—could it be—? It does look kind of dirty-colored—"

Sally caught her excitement. "A 'dirty—dish—rag!' " she quoted from the counting-out rhyme. "That's one

of the clues," she reminded Miles. He and Mama both came over to see it, now.

"It's a dirty dishrag, all right," Amy said breathlessly, plunging the knife into the slit that was already there, and twisting it open. "If you can call a dishrag gourd a dishrag at all."

"Yes!" Sally said, just as breathlessly. "At least, Uncle Will did—"

Amy pulled the fibers apart.

"Look what we've found," she whispered.

It was surely some of Uncle Will's hidden money.

There in one of the sections of the seed pod which had been neatly scooped out lay a small roll of greenbacks.

Miles said, "Well, I'll have to believe in your clues now, Amy. I really didn't think much of them before."

Amy held the spongy thing out to Uncle Will. "Do see how much it is, Uncle Will," she urged.

"Now how could I have forgotten putting it there?" Uncle Will muttered. "I must be getting old." He took the bills out and handed the "dishrag" back to Amy. "Ten—twenty—forty—fifty. Fifty dollars here," he counted. "Plenty to buy groceries with, if Miss Dribble wants to know."

Mama went to the door and called, "Jack! Come quick!"

Jack and Hop rushed in. "What? What's the excitement?" Jack demanded. "Did we miss something?"

"You sure did," Amy told him. "We found the dirty dishrag and it was full of money. Fifty dollars."

"Fifty—" Hop's voice sounded strange; not excited

the way Jack's was, but a little bit scared. Well, Amy thought, maybe fifty dollars does scare a kid who never had fifty cents.

"You girls have all the luck," Jack said enviously.

"Well," Mama told him, "you can have a turn at washing the dishes any time you want to."

Jack made a face.

"We're through now," Sally said, reassuring him.

Amy had scooped the dried seeds out and dropped then into a basket on the shelf, and now was washing the chowder pot with the fiber side of the dishrag gourd. "It really does clean it," she marveled. "It's just as good as a scouring pad, Sally, if you rub hard."

"Let me see," Jack said. "What is it? Where's the dishrag that was the clue?"

Amy explained about the gourd and showed him how the money had been tucked in.

Miles said to Uncle Will, "Be careful where you put that cash, Mr. Will. Maybe you ought to go to the bank and deposit it? I could drive you in to town if you like."

Now Amy noticed that Hop was watching to see what Uncle Will did with the fifty dollars, and she decided that she would have to watch Hop, reluctant though she was to believe that he would steal anything. Well, she argued with herself, but we're all watching too. It's only natural. It doesn't mean he—would—

"No, thanks, Miles," Uncle Will said. "I want to let Miss Dribble look at it next time she shows up." He took an old leather wallet out of his back pocket and put the money in it, then put the wallet back.

"Matter-of-fact, pickpockets might get that beat-up old wallet of yours, Uncle Will," Jack said. "I'll button that pocket for you." He fastened the button over the wallet.

"Thanks, Jack," Uncle Will said. "But Buster will tell me if any pickpockets come around."

"I don't know," Miles said, frowning. "Buster is pretty easy to make friends with." Amy could tell he meant that Buster wouldn't mention Hop in the same bark-bracket with pickpockets.

She said to Jack, "Did you two find anything in the hens' pen?"

"Not a thing," Jack said disgustedly. "Except two eggs." He put his hand in his pocket and pulled it out again, hastily. "And they're broken," he said even more disgustedly. "Matter-of-fact, I guess I must've bumped into something rushing to get here when Mama called me. Lucky we're going swimming right away."

"Hurry up and let's get on our suits," Amy said. Then she remembered. "You can lend Hop that old pair of denim shorts you swim in sometimes, can't you?" she asked Jack.

"Sure," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, he can use my

swim-trunks if he wants to. I like to swim in those shorts. I cut off the legs of a pair of jeans that had holes in the knees to make them," he told Hop. "They're neat. If you don't like the trunks, I've got another pair of jeans I can cut off for you. Except—maybe you can't get into my things," he said doubtfully. "Matter-of-fact, you might be too big for the trunks even—but they might stretch—"

Miles came to the rescue. "I've got some extra swim-trunks I'll give Hop. Wait till we get to my place."

It was a wonderful day to be at the beach, Amy thought after they had swum awhile and were resting on the screened porch of Miles's shack, drinking his soft drinks and watching the sea gulls flashing white-and-gray against the blue. Amy noticed the shack itself was more interesting to Sally than to her, though she liked the simple, easy way he had made bookshelves by stacking bricks for ends and placing planks across them. He didn't have much else but a cot and a table that held his typewriter and piles of papers, and a small oil stove for cooking alongside another small table with two chairs drawn up to it. He put the two chairs on the porch for Sally and Amy—the boys sprawled on the sandy floor. Amy made a mental note to tell Sally, generously, how that old blue swimsuit of hers made her eyes look bluer than the Sound, and how the damp curl of her hair sort

of reminded you of a mermaid; it really did look sharper curly than straight, if Sally only knew it.

"What kind of books do you write?" Jack asked Miles, flipping a sand dollar and catching it as if he were playing heads-or-tails.

"Mystery stories," Miles said. "And other kinds too. But right now I'm in the middle of a mystery and I've got the characters involved in such a problem I don't know if I'll ever get them out. That's why I quit working and went over to Mr. Will's."

"Oh, please tell us about it," Sally said.

Amy had read that article too, in the teeners' magazine, about how you got a guy to talking about himself and what he was most interested in, and proved you were a good listener, and that made him fall in love with you. Ho!

"Well, since I'm right here where I can find out all I need to know about shrimping," Miles said, "I thought I'd use the Portuguese shrimpers for characters. I've spent a lot of time in their community—they live in a special section of Port Oglethorpe, down on the waterfront—and it really is an exciting background. Of course they don't know I'm studying them—I just go and sit in one of the waterfront joints where the men hang out when they're not out on the boats, and watch them and listen to them. There's a girl who looks kind of like a gypsy, who dances at one of the places—"

Amy had been tilting her chair backward with her bare feet on the porch rail, and now she jumped so suddenly that it slid on the smooth boards of the floor and went down, dumping Amy hard on the floor. She rubbed her head mechanically, but she had an idea in it that kept it from hurting.

"The Spanish dancer!" she reminded them. " 'Course, a Portuguese isn't Spanish exactly, but they're as much alike—maybe—as a dirty dishrag is to a dishrag gourd. You know Uncle Will's Spanish dancer that he thought of whenever he tried to remember where he put the diamond?"

Miles picked Amy and the chair up and set them both on their feet. "Well," he said, "matter-of-fact, as Jack would say, she does look a bit Spanish instead of just Portuguese. She dances with castanets in her hand, the way Spanish gypsies do. But what's Mr. Will doing with a Spanish dancer?"

"That was the clue to where he hid the diamond!" Amy explained. "The counting-out rhyme was for the money. But he said every time he tried to remember where he hid the diamond, all that came into his mind was something about a Spanish dancer."

"Odd," Miles said.

"Could we go and see her?" Jack asked. "Matter-of-fact, I'd like to see her dance. I never saw a Spanish dancer except on TV."

"Why not?" Miles said, smiling. "Sometime."

"Is the—joint—where she dances a place we could go to?" Sally asked him. "Do they sell Cokes as well as—"

"As bottles of yo-ho-ho rum and stuff?" Amy finished.

"We could take your mother and Uncle Will too," Miles said, reassuringly. "It's safe enough—except on Saturday nights it might get a little rough. We'll go maybe tomorrow night; it'll be quiet enough on Friday. If Mr. Will sees the 'Spanish dancer,' maybe it'll stimulate his memory about where he put the diamond." Amy noticed with satisfaction that now Miles seemed as certain as they were that Uncle Will wasn't having any delusions. Since they had found the fifty dollars in the dirty dishrag, the diamond seemed a lot more real.

"Now we're getting somewhere!" she gloated.

"What about some of the other clues?" Sally said.

"Matter-of-fact, I think we ought to go back to The Bucket of Blood right now," Jack said, "and look through all of Uncle Will's stuff in the pirates' barroom, to see if we can find any more money hidden like in the dishrag gourd."

"You just want to find some yourself, like we did," Amy said.

"Uncle Will'll need a lot more than fifty dollars if he has to build a bathroom," Sally said. "Remember when Carol's mother did over their house, how much the

bathroom cost? About a thousand dollars, Carol said. So let's get with it. It's nearly suppertime anyhow. Miles, you're coming with us?"

"To spend the night?" Amy reminded eagerly.

"I'll be along after supper," Miles told her.

"We're going to try the Ouija board," Jack said, though Amy hadn't really agreed to that yet. "Maybe we can call up some old pirate."

"Ho! If we did, how would he know where Uncle Will put his money?" Amy was skeptical.

Miles asked, "Did you ever find out anything really, with the Ouija board?"

Amy said, "Well, we get some pretty funny stuff, sometimes. Funny-peculiar, not funny-comical."

"It's coming from their subconscious minds," Sally said rather loftily. "I read a piece about it once."

"You used to do it too," Jack said, telling on her. "You used to believe in it yourself."

"Especially when it said you were going to meet a dark-haired man," Amy said mischievously.

"Another theory is thought-transference," Miles said to Sally. "Somebody in the room might be influencing the results even though he wasn't actually touching the planchette."

"Sometimes it's pretty weird," Sally admitted. "Would you like to try it, tonight?"

"I've got an idea," Miles told them. "Why not get Mr. Will to try it? Then if he has anything buried in his subconscious mind about where he hid the money and diamond, maybe it'll come out."

"What do you mean exactly, subconscious mind?" Jack said, frowning. Amy thought she knew, but she was glad to have Miles go into it a little.

"Well," he said, "your conscious mind recognizes things on the surface, but everything you ever did or wanted or feared or thought is buried somewhere under the surface, in your subconscious mind. You don't know you remember, and if you try, you can't. But you do remember, underneath. Sometimes it can be brought out by hypnosis—they hypnotize a person and make him remember things that happened possibly when he was only a year old. I thought maybe if Mr. Will wasn't actually trying to remember so hard, his subconscious might give us a clue."

"What a wonderful idea!" Sally said. "Miles, I don't know how we'd do anything at all without you."

Ho, Amy thought. But she was as glad as Sally was that he was coming, though for a different reason. She was still scared. Jack was all right, but there were times when she could have used a brother as big as Miles.

When they got home, they found that Uncle Will and Buster had been fishing off the jetty, and Mama was

frying the sea trout and making hush-puppies. There was a good warm smell in the old inn, Amy thought, wondering if the pirates who used to come there had liked fried fish and hush-puppies with their rum. "Catches fishes, puts them in dishes" kept running around in her mind while she helped Sally set the table. Fishes . . . dishes . . . where was the clue to that riddle?

Jack was prowling around in the barroom, with Hop watching him, and Uncle Will showed him where the tunnel for shanghaiing the potential pirates started, under the bar.

"Can I go all the way through it?" Jack asked. "Where does it come out?"

"No; don't. It's probably dangerous," Uncle Will said. "It hasn't been used for a good many years, you know, and it might cave in on you. It might have already caved in, for all I know. I haven't been in it for years, myself."

"Jack, you stay out of that tunnel," Mama ordered.

Jack was peering wishfully into the dark hole under the bar, where Uncle Will had lifted the trap door. "Some day, could we dig it out—maybe from the other end?" he begged. "Where's the other end, anyhow?"

"Down on the bluff," Uncle Will told him. "I'll show you tomorrow. But I don't think it's safe to dig into it from that end either. The sand is too soft and easy to cave in. When the pirates used it they must have

shored it up with beams or something. See, they had their pirate ship moored way out in the Sound, and had a small skiff waiting at the end of the tunnel. One of them in the barroom dragged the drunk man they were shanghaiing out through the tunnel and tossed him in the skiff. Or maybe they hit him on the head to stun him—or drugged him with opium or—"

"Then they went back for another one," Jack surmised. "They could have got their whole crew that way, couldn't they?"

"Well, not a whole crew," Uncle Will said, rationalizing just as seriously. "The regular career pirates would have had to stay in the majority, you see, so that the shanghaied men couldn't mutiny and take over the ship. Sometimes they did anyway."

"Supper's ready," Mama called.

Amy was fingering an object she had found on one of the shelves. It looked like the sculpture they had done in art class at school, when they made a clay mold and then cast the piece and glazed it and fired it in the kiln. Except that this one hadn't been glazed or fired. That was a shame, she thought, because it was really pretty good. Rough, but it looked almost as good as the ones in the museum at home. It was some sort of a bird.

"What's this, Uncle Will?" she asked. "Who made it?"

"Why, I did," Uncle Will said. "I used to be inter-

ested in art. I guess I cast half a dozen of these. They must be around here some place. You want one, Amy?"

"Yes, thank you, Uncle Will; I'd love to have one," she answered. She found herself remembering the book he and Willie had made, with the illustrations they painted. He might really be a good artist, in a way, doing what Miss Sims called primitives. "But what kind of a bird is it?" It had a smooth head and smooth feathers, and was comparatively small, standing stiff-legged on a base that had a decorative edge around it. It would look real neat on my bookshelf, Amy thought, if I glazed it and got Miss Sims to let me fire it in the kiln at school.

"Why, it's a marsh hen," Uncle Will said, and then, just as Mr. Sanders had done, he began to quote, " 'As the marsh hen secretly builds on the watery sod, Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of God—' Did you ever hear of Sidney Lanier, Amy?"

"Once or twice," Amy said.

Sally said with controlled excitement, "Let me see that."

"Why?" Amy held onto it.

"He cast it," Sally said. "And it's a kind of hen! In a kind of pen! Don't you remember, when you cast anything there's always a hole in the bottom—?"

Amy caught the excitement and the two fumbled to-

gether at the bottom of the figurine. "It is!" Amy cried. "It's the clue! There's something in here. Uncle Will, did you—?"

Jack crowded in to see, too. Hop stayed back, but he was watching.

"Maybe I did," Uncle Will said. "I always liked marsh hens. I'll bet I did put some of the money in there. Seems like I vaguely remember it, now."

Mama called again, "Come to supper!"

"Wait a minute, Mama," Sally said. "Please! We've found some more of Uncle Will's money." She could see it, but couldn't reach it with her fingers; the hole was too small.

"Try a stick or something," Jack urged. Then, enviously, "I wish I could find one of the hiding places from those clues."

"You're just not smart enough; let's face it," Amy said, teasing. "You have to have brains, boy."

"You and Sally are just lucky," Jack declared. "Hop and I will have the luck next time, I bet."

Sally poked a fork into the hole and dragged out a ten dollar bill, which she turned over to Uncle Will. "Only a ten!" Amy said in disappointment. Mama had come from the kitchen to see what was going on, and she gasped as she said, "More money! Uncle Will, you really will have to put all that in the bank tomorrow.

And it's not safe to keep it here even tonight, with somebody maybe hiding somewhere in the house."

Hop said in a funny, choked sort of voice, "You stay right with Miles all the time tonight, Mr. Will—"

Amy thought, Why, he really seems to care what happens to Uncle Will. And he wouldn't say that about his staying with Miles, if he meant to steal the money. He really sounds like he wants Uncle Will—and the money—to be safe. I was misjudging Hop.

"The fish will be cold," Mama said. "Do come on. We can talk about it while we eat."

Uncle Will put the money in his wallet and Jack buttoned the flap for him again.

The fish and hush-puppies were keen, Amy thought, but the diners were all too excited to know it. They could hardly wait to tell Miles about the new find. When he came they crowded around him with the "hen" to show him.

Miles said, "That was sharp thinking, Sally," and Sally blushed again. Amy thought, She must know it makes her prettier, to get all rosy and confused-looking, flapping her eyelashes down that way. . . . Hey! That stuff she put on them must really have made her eyelashes grow, the way she thought it would. They do look longer than they used to.

"Have some supper, Miles," Mama invited. Amy

hoped he'd say no because they had already finished washing up while they waited for him.

"No, thanks, Mrs. Farnum. I've had mine." He turned to Amy. "I brought my sleeping bag. Do you want me to stay upstairs or down?"

"Upstairs!" Amy said promptly.

"Where's Uncle Will sleeping?" Mama asked. "Maybe Miles should stay with him, because of the money."

"I sleep on this couch," Uncle Will said. "But Buster stays on the floor right by me, and Hop sleeps on that pallet over there. So Miles can go up there with you-all. We'll be all right down here. Nobody's bothered us yet. I just heard a few noises, that's all. It could be the house settling."

"Remember the footprints!" Amy said. "It's not the house settling, Uncle Will. And you didn't have money in your pocket the other nights when nobody bothered you."

"There might be a peephole wherever he's hiding," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact he might be watching and listening right now."

They all looked nervously around the crowded walls, as if expecting to see eyes following them from the knotholes in the weathered pine boards. There were two knotholes almost like eyes, behind the draped shrimp-

net over one mantel. But when Jack climbed up on a chair and poked his finger into them, nobody said ouch.

Then Sally screamed.

And Buster began to bark.

The Ouija Board Seance

"I saw him!" Sally cried. "Somebody was looking in the window. Right there!" She pointed.

Miles was already at the door, but he was delayed by the different-type old-fashioned door latch. Even though he had encountered it before, he had forgotten that this door opened with a leather thong that pulled back a wooden spring made of hickory, instead of with a conventional knob. By the time he got outside, in a matter of seconds, nobody was in sight.

"Are you sure?" he asked Sally. "Maybe you were just all keyed up and imagined it because you were sort of expecting that somebody is hiding around here?"

"I didn't imagine it," Sally said positively. "He was ugly and hadn't shaved. I even think I'd recognize him if I saw him again."

Miles and Jack and Buster went all around the outside of the house, with Miles's flashlight from his car and the

Farnums' from upstairs. Uncle Will's lights were kerosene lanterns—one of them, on the wall, he had told them was an old ship's lantern. But others were the kind railroaders used to carry, swinging from a handle. They didn't give too much light, Amy thought. It could have been just a shadow Sally saw. Maybe. And why didn't Hop go with the boys to search outdoors? Scared?

"There's nobody around here now," Miles said with certainty when the search party came back inside.

"Unless," Amy said fearfully, "he sneaked back inside and is hiding somewhere behind the walls."

"Well, we certainly outnumber him," Miles pointed out, "if there's only one of him."

"Let's try the Ouija," Jack urged. "Let me do it with you, Amy?"

"I thought we were going to let Uncle Will?"

"Let me just show him how."

Amy found a stool and sat opposite Jack under the smoky light of the ship's lantern, with their bare knees touching under the board. "You ought to wash your hands," she told him severely. "You'll get it dirty."

"Aw, it won't rub off. It's just smut from that lantern. I already wiped off all that would come off."

"Be still then," Amy ordered. The others crowded around—all but Uncle Will, who sat on the sofa. But he too was interested. Sally said, "Weird—" and Amy agreed; it was. There were dark shadows in all the cor-

ners; the flame flickered from the wicks; and anything could happen. She was holding her breath, watching the quivering planchette under her fingers and Jack's, trying to hold her own still.

Then the little platform began to move.

"Ouija," Amy whispered, as if to a person, "are you going to help us find the money and the diamond?"

The planchette suddenly skidded across the board and back, and then moved to *YES* and stopped.

"Jack, did you do that?" Amy demanded.

"No! 'Course not. I never did a thing."

"Well, I didn't either. So it must be working. I'll ask it some more. —Ouija, can you spell out what some of the clues mean?"

The planchette wavered between *YES* and *NO*. Then it skittered around rapidly. Amy was too excited to put the letters together, verbally, but Sally spelled out "D-i-s-h-e-s—" .She cried, " 'Catches fishes, puts them in dishes.' "

Amy said disappointedly, "But that's what I've been thinking of—what that clue could mean. It could have come from my subconscious. Anyhow, it's no help. We already knew that much."

Jack said generously to his new friend, "Hop, want to try it?"

Amy thought, Maybe we can find out what's in his subconscious. "Sure, Hop, come on."

Hop was reluctant. His distrust was obvious, yet he appeared fascinated. "What is it that's supposed to be talkin' to you?" he muttered. "Ghosts?"

"Maybe," Amy said. "Or just disembodied spirits."

"They'll tell you where money's hid?"

"Maybe."

"Not really," Sally said. "It's just a game."

"It might be more," Amy reminded her. "Remember the subconscious."

Jack almost pulled Hop over to his stool, to take his place. "Go on, just put your fingers on it like Amy's. That's the way." He placed Hop's grubby fingers on the planchette. "Now, Amy, ask it something."

"Ouija, where's some more of Uncle Will's money?" Amy asked.

The planchette stayed frozen by Hop's apprehension. They waited breathlessly. "Give it time," Amy whispered.

Then the platform moved, slowly, gaining momentum as it went from letter to letter.

"I'm not doin' it!" Hop cried out fearfully. "It's movin' by itself!"

"Sure it is," Jack said. "That's the way it does."

Sally again spelled out the letters aloud. "H-e-l-l—"

"Now it's cussing!" Jack said. "We've gotta have a pirate's ghost on the line."

"Wait! It's going on," Amy said.

"—G-e-t-i-t—" Sally spelled out the cryptic message. "Hell get it? Oh, I see; it's not 'hell,' it's 'he'll.' The Ouija hasn't got an apostrophe. But what does it mean? The money? He'll get it? Who's 'he'?"

"The man you saw at the window?" Amy guessed uneasily. "Hop, were you thinking about that?"

"Naw," Hop said. "I wasn't thinkin' about a thing."

But he was, Amy knew. He couldn't make his mind a blank even if he wanted to. So it must have been his subconscious. She was certain it wasn't hers.

Miles said, "Why don't you let Mr. Will try it?"

"Yes!" Amy said eagerly. "Come on, Uncle Will. You know how?"

Uncle Will knew how, but his fingers were old and shaky. He tried to keep them still while Amy asked, "Ouija, tell us, please, how can we find out what the clues in the verse mean?"

The planchette tilted on one leg, skidded a bit, then began to spell. *R-E-A-D*—it spelled, and then came to a stop.

"Read?" Amy said, disappointed again. "Read what? We all read a lot. But that doesn't help any when we're trying to figure out those clues."

The planchette moved again. *T-R-Y*—

"But we are trying!"

"You're too impatient, Amy," Sally said.

Uncle Will looked up from the board and said, astonished, "It does move without my pushing it. I'm really not moving my hands at all."

"Wait!" Sally urged. "It's still spelling—d-i-c-t-i-o-n

—Do you mean dictionary, Ouija?" The planchette moved over to *YES*.

" 'Try dictionary,' " Amy repeated, puzzled. "Read the dictionary?"

"Oh," Uncle Will said. "If there's anything in your theory about the words coming from the subconscious mind, that might have come from mine. I put my will in the big dictionary for your grandfather to find—I wrote him about it."

"That's right, I remember—in the letter," Sally said. "Then that's what the Ouija means? Where's your dictionary, Uncle Will?"

He got up to find it. Jack took his place. "Let's try it again, Amy?"

The planchette slid over to *GOOD-BY* and stayed there. Amy said, "Seance is over, I reckon, Jack."

Uncle Will brought the dictionary over to the sofa, where they could see better, and flipped through the pages until he found the folded paper. He handed it to Mama. "I'll have to write the whole thing over, for you, Ellen," he said. "But as you're your father's heir, it might hold up, if anything happens to me before I get around to doing it."

"It's hand-written," Mama said.

"Yes; that's legal, in Georgia. You don't have to have a lawyer," Uncle Will told her, "to write your will, if

you get two witnesses. I got Mr. Sanders and his repair man at the service station to sign it."

Amy told herself, I bet he knows more than Miss Dibble. About most everything. He's sort of like Mama, knowing such a lot of little things. It's got to be all the books they read. She picked up the dictionary from where Uncle Will had put it down on the floor. It was a heavy one. Wonder if anybody ever read a dictionary, all through? she mused. I'll read it sometime. When I get time. Then I'll know all the words in the world. I'll have a bigger vocabulary than anybody. No —I guess I won't, either, unless I use them all at least twice. Miss Pearson says you have to use a word twice to make it yours. I expect some of them might take three or four times. Why, it might take me all my life to do that.

Jack said, "Let's try the Ouija again tomorrow night, Amy?"

"Well, it didn't help much. But we might."

"No," Sally said. "Tomorrow's the night we go to the Portuguese place, remember, to see the Spanish dancer."

"What Portuguese place?" Mama said. "What Spanish dancer?"

They brought her up to date on their plans.

"Well, Uncle Will, what do you think?" Mama asked. "Shall we go?"

"It can't hurt anything," Uncle Will said. "Most of those fellows, the shrimp boat men, are good friends of mine. I know Anita, too—the girl you're talking about."

"Is Anita the one?" Amy asked. "The Spanish dancer you think about when you're trying to remember where you put the diamond?"

"Well, no—" Uncle Will thought it over. "No, I don't think of any special Spanish dancer," he said. "Just the general idea."

"Well, maybe you'll remember, when you see her dancing," Amy said.

"I've seen her," Uncle Will said, "and it didn't do a thing for me, as to remembering."

Amy noticed Jack over in the corner, expounding something earnestly to Hop. Jack's brows were drawn together in a frown of concentration. She guessed he was trying to figure out one of the clues. Well, it's his turn, I guess, to find one, she thought tolerantly. " 'Catches fishes, puts them in dishes . . . ?' " What could it mean?

She heard Jack say excitedly, "We'll try it first thing tomorrow. It's gotta be that blackberry patch. That's the only place there are briars around here. Maybe he closed some money up in a can and buried it in the briar patch."

"Ho," Amy couldn't resist saying. "I heard you. 'Wire, briar, limber lock. . . .' Remember Br'er Rabbit

might be in that briar patch. Not to mention Br'er Rattlesnake. Snakes like to hide in blackberry vines."

"We'll throw rocks in there first," Jack told her. "That scares snakes away. And you keep out of this. This is man's work."

"I'll be glad to," Amy said loftily. "I'll be busy finding some of the other hiding places myself."

Sally said, "Miles, is there any way to make the inn more—more secure, for tonight?"

"Hardly any use, is it, if whoever is around here has some way to get in and out without our seeing him? Still, we could weight down the trap door to the tunnel." He went to inspect it, tagged by Jack and Hop. He found he could turn over a heavy bench across the trap door and weight down both ends of the bench with the old-fashioned iron pots he found on the hearth. "At least it'll make a big noise, if anybody comes through," Miles said. He hooked the wooden shutters across the windows. "Now we won't see anybody looking in," he told Sally.

Jack was trying to figure out some way to lock the door. "This is a funny kind of latch," he remarked. "It's just a spring, really, not a lock at all. Matter-of-fact, if this leather string is outside, anybody can pull it and the strip of hickory will move and let him in and then spring back in place to hold it latched. But if we keep

the leather string on the inside, it can't be sprung, and maybe this wooden bolt will hold it shut. It's a real sturdy piece of wood."

"That's what old-timers meant by saying 'The latch-string is out'!" Amy guessed. "When they meant somebody was welcome to come in, they left it out on purpose, I bet."

Jack was pulling the leather cord, watching the thin strip of hickory wood jump back and forth, sliding the bolt as it sprang back into place. "Hey!" he said, almost too excited to talk. "It's—guess what? It's a 'limber lock'! That's just exactly what it is. Amy! Look! It could be unscrewed here—and maybe—"

Amy ran to the door. "And maybe there'd be some money folded up under the wooden part," she said, just as thrilled as he was. "Oh, Uncle Will, did you hide some here?"

"Where's your screw driver?" Miles asked Uncle Will.

The old man reached into a cupboard drawer and found it instantly. He knows just about where everything is around here, Amy marveled, except that money and diamond. Old age sure is a strange thing, to do that to a person.

"I don't know," he muttered, "whether that was one of the places or not. It might be—"

Jack was sputtering, "Hurry up, Miles—" He got in the way while Miles unscrewed the two wooden pieces that made a slot for the wooden bolt. When the first one came off, Jack pounced.

Sure enough, a folded piece of money dropped to the floor from behind the wood.

"Twenty dollars!" Jack cried. "Take the other one off, Miles!"

"Another twenty!"

"Well!" Uncle Will said. "It's a wonder I couldn't remember doing all that, to hide it—"

"Here, sir." Jack handed the bills over to him. "Soon you'll have enough money to build a bathroom, I bet, if we keep on finding it." He buttoned Uncle Will's back pocket again, after the money was put in the wallet, while Miles screwed the latch back together. "Pretty good, eh?" Jack crowed to Amy. " 'Limber lock!' You girls couldn't figure that one out! And tomorrow—"

"It was clever of you, Jack," Amy conceded. "So put your master brain to work on 'catches fishes, puts them in dishes,' why don't you? It's about to drive me mad, running through my mind."

"I'll get to it sooner or later," Jack promised. "But tomorrow we have to see what's in the briars."

Mama saw Uncle Will nodding, and announced, "It's bedtime."

Miles asked her, "Do you think I should stay upstairs with you-all, or down here with Mr. Will?"

"Amy won't sleep a wink if you aren't upstairs with us," Mama said, and Amy agreed vigorously. "I expect Buster would bark if any stranger got in, and we'd hear him and come down."

"All right," Miles said. "Buster and Mr. Will and Hop down here; the rest of us in our bivouac upstairs."

Amy had a hard time going to sleep, even with Mama's cot on one side of her and Miles in his sleeping bag on the other. She was still quivering in every nerve with excitement, but eventually she dozed. It was a light, apprehensive sleep; after a while something woke her. She was tense, listening. Mama and Jack were asleep; she could tell by their breathing. And she rather thought Miles was too. She couldn't tell about Sally because Sally never breathed very loud since she had her adenoids out.

The room was dark and the floor was rigid. She moved to give her other hip relief from the hardness. Her nose itched, and she moved her head restlessly to scratch it against her shoulder.

A board creaked; then there was silence. Then there was another creak.

"Sally!" Amy whispered. "Are you awake?"

"Yes." Sally was on the other side of Mama.

"Did you hear that?"

"What? Not a rat?" Sally sounded scared; Amy knew she'd vote for the dirty-faced man if she had to choose between him and a rat.

"No—at least it didn't squeak. It just creaked."

"They said that's the house settling."

"What do they mean by that?"

"I guess wood contracts at night when it loses the heat of the day and gets cold, don't you s'pose, and makes a little sound when it draws together and leaves a space between the cracks?"

"I bet it wasn't that. I bet that man you saw is trying to get in downstairs and get Uncle Will's money. Hadn't we better wake Miles up?"

"Go ahead," Sally said faintly. "But don't wake Jack. If Jack stays asleep, maybe Miles can sneak up on that guy and catch him—if it's really the man I saw—"

"Listen!" Amy said. "I heard something else. Some kind of a noise downstairs." She sat up and unzipped her sleeping bag, and reached over to shake Miles. "Wake up, Miles," she whispered hoarsely. "There's somebody downstairs!"

Miles was up in an instant. "What did you hear?" He was whispering too; they both kept their voices very low, instinctively.

"Just a noise. After the boards creaked."

"I'll slip down the stairs and see—"

"I'll go with you." Amy didn't really feel brave; she just felt safer with Miles than with the others.

"Better stay here," Miles advised, but he didn't really order her not to come; so she followed him. He had his flashlight, but he didn't turn it on as he moved cautiously toward the floor below. The door at the head of the stairs had been left open on purpose. The stairs were

dark; there was of course no ray of light from the shuttered windows in the barroom downstairs. She could hear Miles breathing softly; she could hear her own heart beating very loud.

Then there was another sound—she heard it distinctly—as if the iron pot had been pushed from the end of the bench it weighed down over the trap door. Her hand on the stair rail felt the newel post, and she knew they were at the foot of the staircase.

Miles had moved ahead of her, and suddenly a beam of light from his powerful flashlight cut the darkness.

It was as though the light made a tunnel right through the dark, and at the end of the tunnel there was a white face.

Miss Dibble Sees Hop

"What are you doing there?" Miles spoke harshly, and Amy didn't blame him. It was Hop standing there beside the trap door to the tunnel.

"Nothin'," Hop said defiantly.

"Why aren't you asleep?"

"I heard a noise," Hop said quickly. "I come over here to see if somebody was tryin' to get in."

Miles and Amy could see, now that they went behind the bar, that the iron kettle had indeed been shifted from the end of the overturned bench to the floor. Had someone pushed the trap door from the other side? Or —Amy wondered—was Hop trying to move it, for some reason of his own? She hated to think badly of him, but Buster should have barked, if anyone else than his familiar Hop had been trying to move the barrier. Still, Hop just might be telling the truth. She had to give him the benefit of the doubt. And he clearly wasn't

trying to get Uncle Will's money. The old man was still asleep, lying on his back with his wallet under him (she supposed) in his back pocket. He hadn't put on any pajamas, Amy noticed, and she thought it was a good idea, since his pajamas probably didn't have a back pocket. If he had any pajamas.

Miles wasn't too concerned about hurting Hop's feelings. "What were you really doing?" he asked sternly.

"I told you."

Uncle Will woke up and said, "What's happened?"

"See if your money's safe, sir," Miles told him, lighting one of the lanterns. "We heard a noise and found Hop here by the trap door. He said he heard someone trying to get in."

"And you scared him away? Good boy, Hop!" Uncle Will said. He counted his money in the dim light; it was all there.

Miles looked at his watch. "It's four A.M.," he said. "I think I'll sit up the rest of the night. You all go back to sleep." He looked hard at Hop; Amy could tell he was thinking Uncle Will was too easy on him, believing his story. That was why Miles was sitting up—to watch Hop. He didn't believe Hop was trying to keep somebody from coming in through the trap door.

Amy said, "It's lucky Jack didn't wake up. Sally's awake, though. She'll probably come down in a little while and keep you company." Now that she knew

Miles was awake and on guard, she could sleep, she felt sure. She was suddenly very sleepy. She yawned and went back upstairs. Before she reached the top, the lantern light went out; so she knew Miles had got Uncle Will and Hop to lie down again and had settled into the ragged armchair in the dark.

As Amy clicked off her flashlight and crawled back into her sleeping bag, Sally whispered, "What was it?"

"Don't know. Hop said he heard something and was trying to see if somebody was coming through the trap door. The iron pot had been moved."

"I don't trust that boy," Sally said.

"Miles doesn't either. He's staying up to watch him the rest of the night. But I kind of believe Hop's a good kid underneath. At least I'd like to believe he is."

"What time is it?"

"Four o'clock."

"Well," Sally said, "in a couple of hours I guess I'll go down and make some coffee."

"I kind of thought you would," Amy said innocently.

"Oh, go to sleep!" Sally said.

Amy wondered if a girl could blush in the dark, but she decided not to ask Sally.

After breakfast the next morning Jack asked Uncle Will if they could borrow a pick and shovel and dig in the briars of the blackberry patch. He showed them

where he kept his garden tools, in a little woodshed between the outhouse and the chicken house. "It won't hurt a thing for you to dig there," he told them. "But I don't think that's where I'd ever have dug a hole to hide anything in. That's hard work, and I never was one to work any harder than I had to. Plenty of other places I could've hidden the money without going to all that trouble."

"Well, it might have been the only place you could find any briars, to match the rhyme," Jack answered logically. "At least it's the only place I see any. Let's try it, Hop."

Amy sat on a driftwood log that Uncle Will had once dragged up from the beach and watched them for a while, idly chewing on a piece of grass. Miles had gone home to do a little work, he said, but she thought it more likely he would get in a little sleep. He had accepted their invitation to come for supper that night and take them to the Portuguese place afterward. Sally was helping Mama in the kitchen. Uncle Will and Buster came by on their way to go crabbing. Uncle Will was carrying his crab-net—a dip net on the end of a long pole—a big crocus sack, and some very smelly meat in a bucket. Amy wrinkled her nose at it, and Uncle Will laughed. "The worse it smells, the better they like it," he told her. "Want to come along?"

"Yes, sir. Wait till I tell Mama."

They strolled down to the foot of the bluff where there were rotting posts that had once held a pier of sorts. In the shallow water there were plenty of crabs, Uncle Will assured Amy. He pointed out an almost hidden opening in the bluff, screened by scrub oaks and sweet-myrtle bushes. "There's the other end of the pirates' tunnel. I'll have to show it to Jack. But it won't do for him to try to go through it." He picked a twig of pale-green sweet-myrtle leaves and rubbed them between his bony fingers, showing Amy how this brought out the pungent fragrance.

"The plants around here are different from ours," she observed, rubbing some myrtle herself and sniffing delightedly. "We don't have grass like this either."

It was the long, thin, tough grass she had been chewing on—wire grass, Uncle Will told her. "Geechee Negroes used to make baskets out of it. I've got one of them I'll show you. About a dozen or so of the long blades of grass held together make a nice round piece to weave with others like it into a basket shape. They bound the strips with grasses too, but you could use raffia if you wanted to make one."

"Wonder if I could?"

"I expect you could. Always try everything—at least once."

Amy nodded. "I will." She understood what he meant. It was good to adventure and experiment and believe you could do anything you attempted. No use to be scared to even try.

Uncle Will showed her how to tie the crab meat onto the end of a string, and toss it out into the shallow water. He could maneuver the bait as he wished, by pulling the string. Almost immediately she could see the crabs scurrying to surround it. "Look at them!" she cried. "But they're blue. I thought crabs were red, Uncle Will."

"That's after they're cooked," he told her. "You'll see. They change color in the boiling water. I make a fire out in the yard and cook them in a big old iron washpot."

He dipped the net under the cluster of waving pincers and drew out about six crabs at a time hanging onto the bait. He dumped them into the crocus sack and tied a knot in the top, until he could catch another netful.

"Let me catch some?" Amy said. He turned the net over to her, tossed the bait out, and held the sack open while she dumped the bright-blue creatures in. "They're such a pretty color," she said. "Sort of blue-green like the water looks way out yonder." Close up the Sound wasn't blue at all, but brownish.

"Don't let them nip you," Uncle Will advised.

"Are they like turtles and won't turn loose until it thunders?"

Uncle Will laughed. "They probably wouldn't turn loose until we put them in the pot."

"You mean—you cook them alive?"

"Don't look so horrified, Amy. That's the only way. They're not good to eat unless they're cooked alive. But don't worry; it doesn't hurt them."

"How do we know it doesn't? Suppose it did?"

"Biologists have studied crustaceans and assure us they don't know what pain is. They die instantly—but even if they didn't, they don't have senses like ours; they can't feel. So we can eat these big fellows in good conscience, Amy. They're great eating."

"Mr. Sanders said Buster eats crabs and spits out the shells."

"He does. Do you know how to pick crabs?"

"No, but I'll try anything. Once."

"That's the spirit."

"Can we catch oysters around here too?" Amy wondered.

"There are plenty of oysters," Uncle Will answered, "but we can't eat them. It's a shame—oysters are great eating, too. Ever go to an oyster roast? You put them on a grill in their shells, or steam them in the shells in a

covered pot if you'd rather, and then pry open the shells and dip them in melted butter and salt and pepper. It makes my mouth water to think about them."

"Why can't we have an oyster roast," Amy asked, "if there are plenty of oysters?"

"The Health Department found that the water is polluted around the oyster beds, and until they clear up the trouble—they think it's the paper mill waste products—the oysters shouldn't be eaten. They'd make us sick. But some oyster bootleggers take the polluted oysters and sell them anyway, frozen. They think more of making money for themselves than of health precautions. You know you aren't supposed to eat fresh oysters in months without an *R* in them, like June—but the oyster bootleggers found out they can sell them frozen any time in the year, to unscrupulous dealers whose products aren't inspected by the government people. They don't care how many people get sick from those oysters."

"Guess we'd better stick to crabs," Amy said.

"Yes, and fish and shrimp. Things that don't live in beds that can be polluted. Let's catch a few more of these big old crabs and then go home."

The points of the crabs' claws showed through the coarse weave of the crocus sack as Uncle Will hung it on a stick to carry it home over his shoulder, far enough from it so that they couldn't pinch him. Walking back

on the path behind him, Amy watched, fascinated, as the creatures moved around inside the sack, a commotion under the brown, rough cloth. She imagined how it would feel to be inside there with them, and shuddered. It was like a horror movie—a great Crab Monster came up out of the Sound and. . . .

Then she looked up and saw the foreign car come to a stop in front of the inn. "There's Miss Dibble!" she said. "Oh, I hope she didn't catch Hop—Hurry, Uncle Will!"

"No use to hurry. She won't go," he grumbled. "I wish she would. I could turn loose these crabs under her and maybe—" For a minute he looked as though he really might do it.

"We're too late anyhow," she said, as she came within sight of the back of the house. "She's already seen Hop."

Miss Dibble was wobbling across the back yard toward the briar patch where the boys were digging. They hadn't seen her yet. Amy ran ahead of Uncle Will and arrived before her. "Hey, you two," she said urgently. "Miss Dibble's coming."

It was no use to run. Hop stood very still, as if he thought he was invisible as long as he didn't move. Jack put down his pick and squared his shoulders.

Amy said, "Good morning, Miss Dibble." There wasn't anything else to do.

"And who's this?" Miss Dibble said, and Amy remembered that the Welfare sister hadn't met the hiding boys when she was there before. She stammered the introduction, "My brother Jack, and—"

"Well, good morning, Miss Dibble," Jack said bel-

ligerently. Hop said nothing. Before Amy could think of a way to introduce him, Miss Dibble said, like a fat bee dripping honey, "And isn't your other brother going to say good morning too?"

Amy felt like shouting Ho! inside. Miss Dibble thought, because Hop had red hair and freckles too, that he was another brother! Well, let her think. It wasn't a lie to let her draw her own conclusions. "His name is Hop," she said noncommittally. "Hop, tell Miss Dibble good morning," she commanded with what she hoped was a significant frown that would let him know to keep quiet except to be polite. Hop mumbled, "Morning"—at least that was what Amy thought it was. "He's shy," she told Miss Dibble. "I guess you want to see Uncle Will? He's coming. We've been crabbing."

Uncle Will reluctantly approached. Buster rushed, barking furiously, to threaten Miss Dibble's stout ankles. Uncle Will called him back, but his heart wasn't in it.

"Good morning, Mr. Durden," Miss Dibble said in that put-on voice of hers. "And how are we this morning? Are we ready to go and at least see the Golden Age Haven? You'd love it if you saw how happy all the Senior Citizens are over there. Remember the Three Gs!"

"We're wasting our time, Miss Dribble," Uncle Will

said with gentle sarcastic emphasis on the *we* and *our*. "We are not going anywhere. We're fixing to boil crabs over there in that black washpot, and if we don't get out of the way, our feet might get a few crabs attached to them. Crabs have a way of escaping the pot sometimes."

"And they won't let go till it thunders," Amy told her. "That is, if they're like turtles."

"Matter-of-fact," Jack added earnestly, "they don't even let go when it thunders. They aren't that much like turtles. They hold on and hold on and pinch and pinch—" He screwed up his face realistically to show how it would hurt.

Miss Dibble followed Uncle Will to the other side of the yard, where the washpot stood. He started building his fire and pouring water from the pump bucket into the big black iron pot, as if she weren't there. The children watched from the edge of the dug-up blackberry patch.

"I hope lots of the crabs get away from Uncle Will and carry her right back into the Sound with them," Amy said. "Can't you just see them dragging her?"

"She's too heavy," Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, it would take monster crabs—"

"I thought of that," Amy said. "A horror-movie Crab Monster—how does that grab you?"

Hop said, on a note of astonishment, "She didn't know I wasn't your brother."

"Wasn't it great!" Amy said gleefully. "That's the best thing about Miss Dibble—she can be so wrong. Well, did you-all find any of Uncle Will's money in the briar patch?"

"Not a bit," Jack told her dismally. "We've blistered our hands digging, and there's just nothing here."

"Well, we must be reading that clue wrong," Amy said. "Let's think about it some more. Hey, look, he's dumping the crabs in. That water didn't take long to boil!"

"They're getting away!" Jack said, jumping up and down and doubling over, laughing. "They're after her!"

"Don't let her see you laughing," Amy urged. "It's not polite. Laugh inside, can't you, like me?"

Miss Dibble retreated toward the house, and they saw Mama let her in—none too soon. The crabs almost seemed to know they were after her—though Uncle Will assured the children gravely that crabs don't really care about chasing Welfare sisters; they were just trying to get away. The boys helped round them up, grasping them behind the claws as Uncle Will demonstrated, so as to avoid the pinching, and threw them in the boiling pot, where the fire-magic worked and they turned red instantly. Amy assured Jack and Hop that

it didn't hurt the crabs. They didn't seem to care too much. Jack was eager to see Buster eat crab, but he had to wait for them to cool.

In a few minutes Miss Dibble came out and squeezed into her little car, saying as she departed, "I hope you'll be ready next time I come, Mr. Durden. We really must get you moved. Someone from the Health Department will be coming to see you about breaking the Sanitary Ordinance. Do keep remembering our Three Gs!"

"Good-by, Miss Dribble," Uncle Will said. "Oh, by the way, you may be interested to know we found some of my money; and I'll have plenty to satisfy the Health Department about my new plumbing."

Miss Dibble stopped the car with a jerk, and leaned out. "You found money? Here?"

"Just where I mislaid it," Uncle Will said. He drew out his wallet and ruffled the edges of the bills in it, almost letting her see how much it was. Jack buttoned it back into his pocket for him.

"Well! How much?" she demanded.

Softly, Uncle Will answered, "Enough."

"The Sanitary Department will see about that!"

After she drove away, Jack said indignantly, "Why didn't you tell her it was none of her cotton-pickin' business, Uncle Will?"

"Why, I always try to be especially courteous to

people I dislike," Uncle Will said. "It—as you children say—bugs 'em."

"That's why you didn't sic the crabs on her?" Amy said. "Just let them get after her on their own?"

"They recognized her!" Jack said cheerfully. "She's such an old crab—she might be their long-lost sister—"

"Hush, Jack," Mama said. "That's not respectful." She had come out to tell Uncle Will that Miss Dibble was really serious about the Health Department ordinance.

"Never mind, Uncle Will," Amy said. "We're going to find the rest of your money. I know we are." *Fishes? In dishes?*

Uncle Will was gathering the red, now unmoving crabs in a big dishpan. "Come on, let's all start picking crabs," he said. "We can eat enough for our lunch as we go along, and save the rest for deviled crabs for supper."

They followed him into the kitchen, where he spread newspapers on the big table and put the pan of crabs in the middle. "Show me the wire-grass basket, before we begin?" Amy asked. He pointed it out, on the mantel; it was the one he kept his old pipes in. "It's real pretty," Amy said. "I'll try to make me one. I'll cut the grass for it, this afternoon."

They sat around the table—a long bench for each

side and a chair at each end provided seating, country-style—and Uncle Will showed them how to break off the claws and crack them with a nutcracker; how to pull the shells apart; and which parts were good to eat and which had to be discarded. Sure enough, Buster really did eat crab meat and spit out the shells; he liked the claws best. Jack laughed at him so hard he nearly fell off the bench. They all ate their fill, with saltines and hot strong tea, and had a bowlful of the shiny white meat left.

"I hope Miles likes deviled crabs for supper," Sally said.

"We can have a green salad too," Mama said. "I saw lettuce and radishes and green onions in the yard, Uncle Will."

"Yes. And I have potatoes to fry. And I'll go down to the docks and buy some shrimp, if Miles is going to town," Uncle Will said. "The shrimp boats should come in this afternoon, and fresh shrimp are really fine eating. I used to catch plenty of them myself, but I can't handle the net any more." He nodded toward where he had hung up his net on the wall. Amy thought, The sinkers make the net droop as if it were sorry he can't go shrimping any more. Like somebody's mouth who's feeling sad. It was a circular hand net with lead sinkers sewed into the edge to take it down into the water when

it was cast out from the boat. A cord drew up the edges when the shrimp were inside.

"I'll drive us to town to get them," Mama said. "No use to bother Miles, if he's working. It won't take long. Children, do you want to go?"

Hop was afraid of being recognized if he went in to town, Amy knew. "I'll stay," she offered. "I want to look for some more of the hiding places." Jack immediately wanted to stay too; but Mama vetoed both. "If it weren't for that man Sally saw at the window, I'd let you," she said. "But I can't risk it."

Jack said, "Come on, Hop. There's plenty of room."

"I better not." Hop dug a toe into the ground. "Thanks just the same," he told Jack awkwardly, and Amy marveled, He's getting civilized; he really is. She wondered if it were safe to leave him here to hunt the money alone—what if he found it? And then she was ashamed of her suspicion. Of course Hop wouldn't steal from Uncle Will. Would he?

"Well, we can be thinking about the clues, anyway, while we're gone," she said, "and start looking again as soon as we get back. You know we've got to hurry, before that Health Department and Miss Dibble can do anything."

She began to chant the rhyme over again. " 'Catches fishes, puts them in dishes—' We haven't got that one

yet. We got the hens in pens. We haven't got the 'wire, briar' yet—but we did get the 'limber lock'—'three geese in a flock,' no—'one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the two gooses' nest,' not yet—'the clock ran down, the hands turned around'—Uncle Will, that cuckoo clock had run down. Do you remember putting any money in it?"

"No," Uncle Will said, shaking his head perplexedly. "I don't think I did, or I'd remember. But you're right; it's a clock that ran down. Let's try turning the hands around, when we get back, and see what happens."

Amy could hardly wait. They bought shrimp from a Negro man Uncle Will knew, a Geechee with the strange name of Gow Wallie. He was a hand on the shrimp boat *Maria Teresa,* which had just come in. Its captain, whom Uncle Will called Cap'n Joe, told Gow Wallie to let Mr. Will have all the shrimp he wanted. "Got plenty this run," he called to Uncle Will. "Plenty for the freezin' plant and all my friends too."

"Thanks, Cap'n Joe."

Amy thought happily, Uncle Will knows how to accept a present without a lot of protesting and trying to pay for it. He was smiling with pleasure that Cap'n Joe was his friend. "We're going to see Anita dance tonight," he told the captain.

"I'll tell her."

As they drove away, Jack holding the big newspaper-wrapped package of green shrimp smelling of the sea, Uncle Will said, "Anita is his niece."

"Then why isn't his boat named Anita something?"

"Because Maria Teresa is his wife. But Anita will probably be Queen of the Shrimp Fleet. She's the prettiest one—at least I think she is. And lots of the men think so too. She'll be riding the prow of the *Maria Teresa* when the boats come up for the Blessing."

When they got home, while Mama was getting ready to boil the shrimp and make the salad, Amy urged, "Come on, Uncle Will—let's turn the clock's hands around and see what happens. Maybe the cuckoo will come out and drop some money in your hand."

"Ho!" Jack said. "You don't crack these clues that easy. You've got to work your brain if you want to find Uncle Will's money. Like I did on the limber lock," he said, bragging.

"Where's Hop?" Sally said. He hadn't come out to meet them, but now they saw him limping up from the shore, the way Amy and Uncle Will had come from the crabbing expedition.

"Where've you been?" Jack asked him.

"Nowhere. Just down there."

"Find anything?"

"No. Wasn't lookin'."

"Well, Uncle Will is going to try the clock clue. Come on."

"Why don't you do it, Amy?" Uncle Will said. "Just turn the hands around and see. . . . You can stand on this stool."

The Cuckoo Clock Clue and the Spanish Dancer

Amy stood on the stool and reached up to the clock's hands. "It won't cuckoo, will it, when it's not running?"

"No. I've forgotten when it stopped—must have been a good while ago. And I just never bothered to start it again, I guess. You start it by pulling up each of the weights and then swinging the pendulum."

"Maybe we hadn't better start it, though," Amy said. "Since the clue said the clock ran down. Then 'the hands turned around.' "

It had stopped at ten minutes to three. Mama noticed the time and asked Uncle Will, "Did you do that on purpose—because of Rupert Brooke?"

He laughed, delighted with her. "Maybe I did—I've forgotten." Then he quoted, and she joined in and said it with him, " 'Yet stands the Church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?'—We ought to get us some honey, Ellen. Willie and I used to like honey with fresh bread."

"Next time we go to the store," she agreed.

Jack said impatiently, "Go on, Amy. Turn the hands around."

Amy had paused to make a mental note to look up that poem they were talking about. She liked bread and honey, too. "All right."

She held her breath and turned the large hand to twelve. Nothing happened. The small hand stayed on three, and the clock was silent.

"Keep on turning," Jack urged.

"Wait—let's give it time. At least on each hour."

After a pause she turned the large hand the full round, until it was four o'clock. Nothing happened. Again. Five o'clock? No. Six? Seven? Eight? Nine? Ten? Eleven? Twelve?

She pushed gently at the large hand. It wouldn't move any more. She stared at it, baffled. "Uncle Will—it's stopped for good. It won't go any further!"

"I reckon I must have had some reason for fixing it to stop there," Uncle Will said, "if I did. But I certainly can't remember. I used to know a lot about old clocks —I'd buy broken ones and fix them up and sell them for lots more money, as antiques. But why would I want this one to stop at twelve?"

"There's gotta be a reason," Jack said.

"It might have been just a whim," Mama said. "Per-

haps any other number would have done as well. Just so 'the hands turned around.' "

Amy got down off the stool. "We'll have to think hard, to find out what that twelve is trying to tell us."

She sat on the stool and put her chin on her fists, shutting her eyes tight.

"What are you doing, Amy?" Miles came in with a large, red, net sack of oranges in one hand and a watermelon under the other arm.

"Thinking," Amy said. "You think too, Miles. What could twelve mean? We tried the clock clue and the hands stopped at twelve and wouldn't go on."

"That's a tough one," Miles agreed.

"Matter-of-fact, it's impossible," Jack said.

"No, it isn't," Amy said stubbornly. "Sometimes you can't think when you're trying real hard, and then when you've about forgotten to bother, the answer will just come to you out of nowhere."

"Out of your subconscious," Sally offered.

"Well, I hope it'll come from somewhere. I'll give it a chance—I'll think about watermelon instead. Miles, how did you know we love watermelon?" All but Sally, she had started to say, and then stopped herself. Ho—Sally would probably eat it, this particular watermelon. Even though she usually turned up her nose at it.

"Everybody loves watermelon." Miles put it on the

kitchen table. "I bought it already cold, too. There's nothing quite as good as an ice-cold slice of melon on a hot day, is there, Sally?"

"Great," Sally agreed. Amy pinched Jack; he had opened his mouth to ask when Sally started liking watermelon. "Shut up," she whispered.

"Why?"

"Never mind." Jack would be sixteen too, sometime —probably—but boys would never understand things like that, no matter how old they got. "Hop, do you like watermelon?"

"Sure he does." Jack answered for him.

Hop was staring at the clock. Amy wondered if he had any ideas about what the twelve could mean. It was a sort of vacant stare, though. She asked him what he was thinking, but he just shook his head. Hop wasn't much help, Amy told herself. But she'd keep an eye on him, in case he had thought of something he wasn't telling.

After supper everybody but Hop piled into Miles's car to go to the place where Anita danced. Hop was still scared to be seen, even though Amy reminded him that Miss Dibble thought he was their brother.

A sign on the front of the joint said *Vasco's* in neon lights, and inside it was darkish, with lighted candles in bottles on the tables made of some wood dark with age,

placed around the sides of the room. The candle wax running down the outsides of the bottles had made pretty streaks in various colors. Most of the people at the tables looked dark and foreign, but when they spoke genially to Uncle Will and Miles, Amy was surprised that they didn't have any foreign accent. Mama told her later that they were second-generation Portuguese—they'd been born in this country and went to school like anybody else. Some were probably even third generation, the young ones like Anita.

She was the pretty girl in the full-flowered skirt and low-cut blouse embroidered in red and blue, who brought their Cokes and potato chips. She wore dangling hoops in her ears, and the hoops were silver inlaid with turquoise.

"This is Anita," Uncle Will said. He apologized, "I don't know what I'm going to do about my memory, Anita. I can't remember your last name."

"Galetto," she told him, smiling.

"This is my niece, Mrs. Farnum, and my grandnieces and nephew, Sally, Amy and Jack. You know Miles."

"Yes. Hello," Anita said, smiling at each one separately. Her red lips were beautiful, smiling. Amy could see Sally wondering about that last bit, about how well Anita might know Miles. But Sally smiled right back at her, and Amy thought warmly, Good for Sally.

"They want to see you dance," Uncle Will told Anita.

"In a few minutes," she promised. "As soon as the music gets here."

The music turned out to be two guitars and a violin that thrummed and throbbed and wove lively tunes for Anita's nimble feet and lithe body. Her skirt whirled as she danced in a spotlight in the center of the room. She clicked small castanets in her hand in time to the Latin tunes.

"The word comes from chestnut," Mama told them. "I guess the first castanets may have really been chestnuts. Or perhaps they were made of chestnut wood because it was hard and made a good click."

Anita, after she finished the dance, came back to their table and dropped into a chair, flushed and breathless. "When you get your breath," Amy said politely, "please show us how the castanets work."

"Nothing to it." Anita fitted the loop on Amy's thumb and showed her how to click the two pieces together with her middle finger. Then Jack had a turn.

"It was a beautiful dance," Sally said to Anita. "You look so lovely doing it."

"Thank you. If I do, it's because I like dancing better than anything else."

"Uncle Will says you'll probably be Queen of the Shrimp Festival."

"It hasn't been announced yet. Maybe it's my turn. Angela Castagnino had it last year. You all must come."

"What time is the Blessing?" Uncle Will asked.

"About ten Sunday morning—down at the docks, you know. Miles, will you have your boat in the fleet to be blessed? Mr. Will, how about you?"

"Do they have such little boats in it too?" Jack asked.

"Oh, yes. Every kind of boat you can think of, from the smallest to the largest. They all have to be blessed," Anita told him.

"Maybe I will," Miles said, but Uncle Will shook his head. "We'll watch," he said. "Thanks, Anita."

The music started, and Anita left them, swirling out between the tables to dance again in the open space, her fingers clicking along with the heels of her black slippers. Amy wondered if Sally were thinking, But she's a lot older than I am. That's what Amy was thinking.

"Well, Uncle Will," she said, "does the dance make you remember anything at all about where you hid the diamond?"

"No." Uncle Will shook his head perplexedly. "I'm sorry to say it doesn't ring a single bell."

"Well, it was fun being here, anyway," she said to comfort him. "And we did get invited to the Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet."

"Say, how big is that big old diamond, anyhow?" Jack asked. "Bigger than the one in Mom's ring?"

"It's about as big as the end of my thumb," Uncle Will said.

Amy's eyes widened. "Why, that's enormous!" she exclaimed. "For a diamond."

"You're thinking about cut diamonds like the one in your mother's ring," Uncle Will explained. "This is a rough diamond. I never had it cut and polished."

"What's a rough diamond like?" Jack asked. "Matter-of-fact, I never saw one. Neither did Amy," he added, wrinkling his nose at her.

"It looks kind of like a pebble," Uncle Will said. "Not very impressive. It doesn't really look like a diamond at all, until it's cut."

"I've been looking for the wrong thing," Jack said earnestly, just as if that were the reason he hadn't found it up to now, Amy thought with a silent Ho!

"We'll start looking for something like a pebble now," she said. "What color is it?"

"Sort of whitish-gray," Uncle Will told her. "You know coal is one form of carbon—which is what a diamond is too. This one looked like a little roundish lump of coal with a white film that grayed it."

"I'm glad we came," Mama said as Miles paid for the Cokes. "Thanks, Miles. It was a great experience for the children, seeing Anita dance. And being invited to the Blessing."

"You don't really have to have an invitation to that, Mrs. Farnum."

"I'm glad, too," Sally said. "Is Anita one of the characters in your book, Miles?"

"In a way," Miles said. "She gets killed in the first chapter."

That ought to make it all right with Sally, Amy thought. It'll probably be one of her favorite books.

Miles spent the night with them again, but he said he was going to stay downstairs in the armchair so he would be on hand if anyone tried to come through the tunnel. "We must look at the other end of that tunnel tomorrow, sure," he told Uncle Will. "Somebody may have been in it since you explored it."

"I meant to show it to Jack, anyhow," Uncle Will agreed.

"Before we go to bed," Jack said, "could we try the Ouija board once more? Huh, Amy? I do want to see if a pirate ghost would tell us anything."

"We'll try," Amy said, "but it won't be a pirate ghost."

The board wouldn't cooperate, with Jack's and Amy's hands on the planchette. It spelled *DISHES* once, which Amy discounted as coming from her subconscious mind, and then it kept sliding to *GOOD-BY*.

"Let Miles and me try it," Sally suggested. "Maybe it needs a fresh approach."

Amy grinned. Ho! Sally had just done her fingernails. Her hands really did look nice on the planchette—her fingers were long and slender. Miles had nice tanned hands. When their fingers touched, Sally turned a bit pink, but that was hardly noticeable in the dim light. The planchette didn't care. It spelled *PIRATE* when Sally asked who was there—but Amy knew that must be thought transference from Jack. Then it spelled *TUNNEL*—but again, Amy thought she knew where that came from. When it glided to *GOOD-BY*, Miles said, "Let Mr. Will try it again. After all, what we want to know is surely in his subconscious."

Uncle Will said, "I'll try to think about something else. Then maybe it'll come out." He sat at the board with Amy.

But the planchette spelled *SHRIMPING*, and then it went back to *DICTIONARY*.

"But, Ouija!" Amy protested. "We already found the will in the dictionary, remember?"

Ouija said *GOOD-BY*. Amy put the board up, disappointed. "Well, I don't believe in it, anyway," she said. "And, Uncle Will, I never did get around to making my wire-grass basket today. I will tomorrow."

Sally was the last one to come upstairs. "Guess what!"

she said to Mama and Amy, after making sure Jack was asleep. "Miles is going to take his boat out Sunday to follow the shrimp fleet, for the small boats' Blessing—and he asked me to come in it with him! Isn't that neat?"

"Neat," Amy agreed.

"That'll be nice," Mama said. "I suppose there wouldn't be room for Amy and Jack too? They'd enjoy it—"

"Oh, Mama! Honestly!"

"Never mind," Amy said. "We wouldn't think of going with you, Sister dear." She had a brilliant idea, but she didn't mention it out loud. She would ask Uncle Will if she and Jack could take his bateau and get it blessed. They could handle a little old boat like that all right. The Sound wasn't a bit rough. They wouldn't go near Miles and Sally, of course.

The next thing she knew it was morning. The others were already up; she could smell coffee. She ran downstairs. "Did I miss anything?"

"Not a thing," Miles told her. "There were some vague noises, but nothing developed from them." He turned to Hop. "Where were you, though?" he asked. "When I woke up this morning, you weren't here."

"I just went down to look at the water, that's all. Can't a guy go out?"

Miles shrugged. Amy could see him thinking Hop's

goings and comings were mighty suspicious. He didn't feel that way about the rest of them. It wasn't exactly fair. She or Jack could go out any time and Miles wouldn't think a thing of it.

They had to wait an hour after breakfast before going swimming, of course, and all the time Amy was trying to puzzle out some more of the clues, while she cut wire grass and started to copy Uncle Will's wire-grass basket. She wasn't much of a success as a basket-maker, she decided. It was a very lopsided effort. She gave it up without much regret when the others were ready to go to Miles's for a swim.

"The clues have me beat," she said. "Why don't some of the rest of you try too? You aren't doing a thing about finding the money and diamond."

"I'm thinking, Amy," Jack declared. "Matter-of-fact, right now I'm thinking about that old Ouija board. Maybe it meant we should look in the dictionary again. Maybe there's something else in there besides the will. What about that, huh?"

"That's a real sharp idea, Jack!" Excitement seized her. "You could be right. Hurry up and finish swimming and let's go look again."

But when they got back, lunch was ready, and Amy had to wait until the lunch dishes were done. When she got to the dictionary, she found Jack and Hop had al-

ready explored it thoroughly, ruffling all the pages and shaking it upside down. "There's nothing in it," Jack told her glumly.

"That's a fine thing to say about a dictionary," Amy said. "There's a lot in it, even if there isn't any paper that tells us what we want to know. There are words, Jack—thousands of words, and words are—wait a minute! Words! That gives me an idea. After all, the clues are words. The rhyme is words. And they're all in here —where Uncle Will's subconscious said to look."

She sat down on the sofa, clutching the big dictionary, her heart beating faster with excitement. She felt on the verge of cracking the whole secret code. What word to look up first?

"Well, go on!" Jack said impatiently. "Tell us what you mean."

"Twelve," she whispered. "The clock stopped at twelve. Let's see what the dictionary tells us about twelve."

The Clues in the Dictionary

Amy's hands were shaking so from anticipation that she could hardly turn the pages. At *twelve* the dictionary said, *see numbers*. It was hardly more articulate than the Ouija board, Amy thought. She looked up *numbers*.

"Well, all it is is a list of cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers, whatever they are," she said. She studied the tables of numbers without a glimmer of light.

"What are you doing?" Sally and Miles came in, Mama and Uncle Will behind them.

"Looking up the clues in the dictionary. But—it's not helping as much as I thought it would."

"But what a good idea!" Miles's voice was encouraging. "Sally, you've got a bright sister. That's the best thing anybody's thought of yet. Because of the Ouija, see? If Mr. Will's subconscious said 'dictionary' there must have been some reason—"

"Hey! Wait a minute—here's something." Amy's voice shook. "Uncle Will, where's your Bible?" She

pointed to a *numbers* definition further down the dictionary page. "Numbers: the fourth book of the Pentateuch containing the census of the Hebrews. See Bible."

Jack said, "What's a Pentateuch?" but nobody paid

any attention. They all clustered around the Bible while Amy found Numbers.

"Whee!" That was Jack. Between the pages where the Book of Numbers began lay a hundred dollar bill.

"We're on the right track at last," Miles said. "Now all we have to do is look up the clues in the dictionary and—"

"And figure out what then!" Amy said grimly. "I was pretty shook up when all I saw was that list of cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers."

Uncle Will added the hundred dollars to his wallet's store and Jack buttoned his hind pocket again. "Thanks, Amy," Uncle Will said. "Funny I hadn't any idea about how that dictionary held a clue—I just don't remember things." He shook his head deploringly.

"Never mind," Mama consoled him. "You remembered Rupert Brooke, Uncle Will."

"That's something," Uncle Will agreed.

"What are you going to look up next?" Miles asked respectfully of Amy.

"Well, let's try *fishes*. They've been bothering me."

There were seven meanings of *fish*—and number seven had an *a* and a *b* part. "But not one of the meanings means anything!" Amy wailed after puzzling over it eagerly. "They don't tell us anything about where to look."

"Don't give up yet," Miles urged. "Try another word."

"Well, I'll look up *dishes*."

The noun had five meanings, and Miles was the one who pointed out number three: "The food served in a dish; hence, any particular food, as a cold dish."

"See? Fishes—in dishes—that is, in various foods—fixed up to serve—as in recipes. If a hundred dollar bill could be in a Bible, why not in a cookbook? Mr. Will, do you have a sea food cookbook?"

"Of course I have. Somewhere. I've got just about everything, somewhere." It took awhile to find the cookbook, but sure enough, in the "fish" section of *Old Savannah Recipes* lay another hundred dollar bill.

"Now we're really getting hot!" Amy said happily as Uncle Will put it away.

"But what bothers me," Uncle Will said, "is what did I do with the big money? I had thirty-five hundred dollars that I got for the land—so far we've found only three hundred. I guess I must have thought it was a good idea not to put it all in one hiding place. But if I'm going to satisfy Miss Dribble, I'll need the rest of it too. Amy, you've got to ferret out a whole lot more money yet. But you're the girl to do it."

"Wish I could," Amy said. "Wish we could," she amended generously. "After all, the others help too. That was Miles's idea, about the dishes."

"And don't forget my limber lock!" Jack said. "Matter-of-fact, why don't you look up *briar* next, Amy? Hop and I really worked hard, digging in that briar patch. I've got blisters on my hands, and so has Hop. I sure would like to know what that clue means, if it's not the blackberry patch."

"All right." Amy clowned, making magic passes over the dictionary with her hands before turning the pages to the *B*s. "This one's going to be easy," she prophesied, not really believing it.

It wasn't easy. Jack read over her shoulder, in complete bewilderment, " 'Any plant with a woody stem bearing thorns or prickles—a mass of briar bushes—a twig of a briar.' But Hop and I dug those up and there wasn't any of Uncle Will's money—nor any diamond either."

"But what about the second meaning?" Miles said. "See if that's any help."

"Yes!" Amy shouted. "Of course! 'Wire—briar—' See it?"

"Matter-of-fact, I don't," Jack admitted. "Tell us, quick!"

"I don't either," Miles said.

Amy read, " 'The tree heath of Southern Europe, the root of which is used for making pipes. Two. A pipe of briarwood.' Pipes! Uncle Will's pipes are in his wire-grass basket! Wire—briar—get it?"

Jack rushed for the basket. The five old pipes were dug into in seconds.

Every one of them, under some ancient tobacco, had a wadded ten dollar bill in it.

"Great!" Jack gloated. "Here's fifty more, Uncle Will!"

But Amy didn't feel too elated. "That's still not the whole thirty-five hundred," she pointed out.

"Every little bit helps," Jack told her.

Sally was interested, but she wasn't actively involved. She was sitting by the window, twisting sweet-myrtle and smilax she had gathered in the yard into garlands with oleander flowers. They were for Miles's boat to wear in the procession the next day.

"I wonder if the oleander flowers will last overnight if I put the whole thing in a tub of water?" she asked Miles.

"Sure," he answered absently. "You do that, Sally." But he was paying more attention to the treasure hunt than to the boat decorating, Amy noticed.

"Here, Sally, you look up one," she offered.

Sally took the hint; she wasn't dumb. "Well, what'll I look for?"

Amy ran over the verse in her mind. "We've got all but those stupid geese," she discovered. "And the diamond, of course. Look up *geese*. 'Three geese in a flock.'

'One flew east, one flew west, one flew over the two gooses' nest.' This is a tough one, I bet."

Sally read, " 'Geese, plural of goose.' "

"Well, look up *goose*."

The secret was in the last of six meanings of the word that the dictionary gave. Sally read them all aloud, but nobody shrieked until she read the sixth: " 'plural gooses. A tailor's smoothing iron—from its curved handle.' "

Amy shouted, "The irons on the kitchen hearth! They're gooses!"

"So the hearth could be the two gooses' nest," Sally said. "But—"

"But," Amy concluded dolefully, "we haven't a glimmer of a notion what 'one flew over' it means."

They all went into the kitchen and examined the old irons, but they were solid, heavy iron, and no money showed up anywhere near their "nest."

"Well, it's time for supper, anyhow," Mama said. "Think about it while we eat."

Amy grumbled, "We're on the right track, if we could only keep going! And all anybody thinks about around here is eating. And washing dishes."

"Come on, Amy," Sally said. "You can't find any more money, until we think what that clue means."

Amy said, "Uncle Will, could I see you alone for a minute?"

"Why, certainly, Amy." Uncle Will went outside with her, plainly puzzled, but obliging.

"Uncle Will, Could Jack and I take your bateau to be blessed tomorrow along with the other small boats that follow behind the shrimp fleet? We'd be careful—and we wouldn't have to go very far. We wouldn't go way out—just join the procession near the dock and paddle the bateau a little way to where it gets blessed. Hop could come too except that he's scared of being seen."

"I wouldn't mind a bit, Amy," Uncle Will said. "A blessing wouldn't hurt it, I'm sure. But you'll have to ask your mother if you can go in it."

"Oh, she'll let us. She believes in making us self-reliant. I'll ask her. Thanks, Uncle Will. I'll make some garlands, too, like Sally's. But don't tell her. I'll have to do it where she won't see me. She'd think we were trying to hang around her and Miles. It's not that. We really wouldn't. We'd just like to have some of the fun, too."

"I see," Uncle Will said.

When consulted secretly, Mama said it would be all right. Jack swore he wouldn't tell; so Amy let him in on her plan. After supper, before twilight changed into dark, she and Jack and Hop cut their greenery and flowers and hid them in one of the little rooms upstairs,

sneaking a lantern into the room too. Sally was still working on her garlands in the barroom, and Miles had started helping her. "When she wonders where we are, you think of something to tell her, Mama," Amy whispered behind Sally's back.

"She'll think you're off somewhere, trying to find the money or the diamond," Mama said. "Aren't you letting the Blessing sidetrack that?"

"Yes, I guess we are," Amy conceded. "But we can still be thinking, even while we make the garlands. You think too, Mama. I'm stumped. Uncle Will, can't you possibly think what on earth you meant by 'one flew over' those two flatirons?"

"I'll try," Uncle Will said. "But it's a mystery to me."

Hop was unexpectedly good at twisting the smilax vines around the myrtle to make the long ropes of greenery, even by the uncertain lantern light, but he still refused to appear in public. Amy and Jack urged him until he finally broke out in desperation, "I tell you I can't stand foster homes! They'd get me and put me back in one, if that fat lady knew about me."

"What's bad about them?" Jack wanted to know. Hop couldn't tell him, exactly.

"Just—bein' not your real home. Knowin' you ain't got a real home of your own to stay in—and that you never will have."

Amy understood. "It's like you're just visiting, instead of living there with your own folks. The people you're visiting may be nice, all right, but you still want your own place where you can have your own things. You want to belong somewhere."

"Yes," Hop mumbled. "But they ain't always nice. The last one was mean. And here—with Mr. Will and Buster—well, I almost feel like I belong. Funny, ain't it? Because I don't."

"You feel like you belong because Uncle Will likes boys so much," Jack surmised.

"He likes girls too," Amy said. "Too bad he's not a parent."

"Maybe that's why he likes them so much." Jack made his comical nose-wrinkled face. But Amy knew he was just joking. She and Jack could feel secure enough in Mama's and Daddy's love to joke about it. Hop hadn't any security at all. She felt very sorry for him.

"You're a good kid, Hop," was all she could think of to say for comfort.

"No, I'm not," Hop contradicted, scowling. "I'm—"

"Listen!" Jack broke in. "I heard something. Behind the wall, I think—It's that man Sally saw, I bet. —What'll we do?"

"Get Miles!" Amy said. "I'll get him." She ran to

the head of the stairs, calling, "Miles—hurry—there's somebody—" She had heard it too—as if someone had stumbled and fallen against the wall with a thump. And she was frightened. It was pretty eerie, with shadows in all the corners of the little room, and only the three of them gathered around the one lantern.

Now the others all rushed upstairs—all but Uncle Will—and they brought more lanterns. Miles poked into every room, closet, and passageway, but found nobody. Mama helped him, and Jack whistled for Buster, who made a brave show of flushing out the quarry. But Sally stopped beside Amy's greenery and said, "You're making garlands too?"

"Don't worry," Amy told her, now that it wasn't a secret any longer. "We aren't going to bother you and Miles. It's just that Uncle Will said we could take his boat and get it blessed. Mama said it was all right."

"Oh," Sally said doubtfully. Amy could see her deciding not to be selfish—Sally was really a good kid, for an older sister. "That's great, Amy. I was feeling sort of mean, for having all the fun. I'm glad you and Jack can be in the boat procession too. But what about Hop?"

"He's scared to show himself. I don't blame him. By the way, where is he now?"

The others had finished searching, finding nothing, and had gone downstairs to look around outside. Amy

and Sally hurried to join them. The dark was spotted with lanterns, but they couldn't see Hop anywhere.

"And where's Uncle Will?"

They found him halfway down the path to the shore, sitting on the ground, rubbing his head.

"Something hit me." His words were mumbled. "Somebody, I mean. I thought we ought to see if anybody could be coming out of the other end of the pirates' tunnel—if they really had cleared a way out of the inn. You all were busy and it might be too late if I waited; so I thought I'd go and see—just from a distance—if anybody came out there. But before I got halfway, I got hit on the head."

"How bad is it?" Miles said. "Here, let me see. Hold the lantern close, please, Sally." He reported that it seemed, luckily, to be just a glancing blow, not too serious, and helped Uncle Will to his feet.

"You shouldn't go anywhere alone, Uncle Will," Mama scolded, "especially after dark. You see how dangerous it is."

"You're right, Ellen. I should've had better sense."

Jack had a thought. "Uncle Will! Did they get your money? Your pocket's unbuttoned. They sure did," he concluded in dismay as Uncle Will's hand came out of the pocket, empty. "Oh, Uncle Will—"

"How awful." Sally was all sympathy.

"Well," Mama said, "let's just be glad it was only money, and not his life."

"And," Amy said, "I'm real glad, now, that we hadn't found most of the thirty-five hundred. We can still find nearly all of it, for Uncle Will."

"I was just about to remember something, when I got hit," Uncle Will said dolefully. "I had thought what that last clue might have meant. And now—it's all gone again."

"Well, surely you can think of it again, if you did once," Amy said. "Maybe after you sleep on it."

When they were back at the house, Mama got the first-aid kit from the car and put witch hazel on Uncle Will's bump, and they tried to settle down for the night. Miles moved the armchair close to Uncle Will's couch.

Then Amy noticed that Hop was back. She hadn't seen when he came in, but now he was hovering on the edge of the group around Uncle Will, his face screwed up as if he were anxious about the old man. She caught the boy's arm and pulled him aside.

"Where were you?" she demanded. "When somebody hit Uncle Will, where were you?"

"Nowhere. I wasn't—there—" he stammered.

"Well, you weren't here. Because I looked for you. What were you doing?"

"Nothin'." His face was stubborn and mutinous in

the dim light. "You quit pushin' me around. I didn't do nothin'."

"Now look here, Hop." Amy tried to be reasonable. "I'm pretty sure you wouldn't hurt Uncle Will. Nor take his money either. But you've got to admit that you're acting pretty suspicious. Why don't you level with us? We aren't going to hurt you or turn you in or anything—if you haven't done anything wrong."

"I—can't." His voice was low and desperate, almost like a cry for help, Amy thought.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Let me alone!" He pulled away from her and flung himself down on his pallet of quilts, turning his face to the wall. Poor Hop, she thought, troubled. Nobody of his own—no place of his own—everybody seeming to be against him; what a spot to be in. She saw Buster go over to Hop and nose his arm, and she saw Hop's skinny arm go around Buster and draw the dog close against his side. She felt like crying. Only Buster. . . .

She went upstairs with the others to try to sleep, but it was no use. She couldn't help feeling depressed and troubled—not only about poor Hop, but because all the money they had found so far was gone, and they had no idea about what the "two gooses" clue meant, nor about how to find the rest of the money and the diamond. And Miss Dibble would be coming back—and there'd

be no bathroom for Uncle Will—and they might be able to make him go to the Golden Age Haven after all. Amy thought fiercely, They can't, they just can't. We'll take him home with us first. But somehow she knew he wouldn't go. He was too independent. He'd probably die of a heart attack resisting Miss Dibble and those Health Department people.

She tried to be happy about the Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet tomorrow, visualizing Uncle Will's bateau with the garlands draped around it. That didn't help either.

She was worried about Uncle Will. Suppose he was hurt worse than they thought? Suppose he—died in his sleep? She caught her breath fearfully at the thought. It was intolerable. She got up and crept silently down the stairs to reassure herself that he was all right.

Miles had left one lantern burning, in case anything unusual happened. Amy hesitated at the foot of the stairs, accustoming herself to the dim flicker. Yes, Hop was still there, on the pallet, with Buster beside him. Miles was—yes, he was lightly snoring. She almost giggled. Sally didn't know he snored! Maybe he needed his adenoids out too. She couldn't see whether Uncle Will was breathing or not. Unreasoningly fearful, she tiptoed nearer to the sofa, holding her breath. She could see his wrinkled old face now, peaceful in sleep, but it

was hard to see whether his chest rose and fell, or not. She leaned close, and he sighed and moved his head slightly.

Reassured, Amy stepped back. As she raised her head she saw something—a shadow?—move, beyond the kitchen door.

The Goose Clues

It was no time to think about being brave—about keeping quiet and watching to see who it was. Amy screamed. Afterward she wished she had been courageous enough to get a good look at whatever had moved, but at the time the loud, scared yell that came out of her throat was instinctive. She had lost her chance; there was nothing moving at all in the kitchen by the time Miles dashed in, with Amy close behind him. Jack was there before Hop, who didn't seem to be in any hurry. Sally and Mama were last, with Uncle Will.

"What was it, Amy? Why'd you scream like that?" Jack demanded.

"What were you doing down here?" Mama said. "You know I don't want you wandering around by yourself at night."

"I wasn't exactly by myself," Amy pointed out in self-defense.

"You know what I mean."

"Well, I came down to see about Uncle Will. I was worried about him, for some reason, and couldn't sleep. And after I found out he was all right, I happened to look toward the kitchen and saw something move. It was dark and I couldn't see what it was. Just a Thing. Moving. But when we got here it had disappeared."

"Did it look like that man I saw?" Sally asked.

"It didn't look like anything," Amy repeated patiently. "I didn't get a good look in any light."

"Maybe it was a ghost," Jack said hopefully. "A pirate ghost."

"Well, it could—or rather, he could—have left by the door," Miles pointed out, "which is open. Or"—he held the lantern high to look at the narrow stairs Uncle Will had showed them—"he could have gone up there."

But again their own earlier footprints made it impossible to tell anything from the dust that remained.

"Well," Miles said, "once again—let's look around up there."

"This is getting ridiculous," Sally said.

"We can't take a chance."

"It's nearly daylight anyhow. Why don't we just stay up? I'll make coffee and Mama can fix some breakfast. How about it, Mom?"

Mama was willing, since it seemed unlikely that any-

one could go back to sleep. Miles searched upstairs, with no luck, while she cooked bacon and eggs and toast and coffee.

They speculated, while they ate, about what the intruder had been looking for in the kitchen.

"He must have overheard us finding the 'two gooses,' " Amy decided, "and he was examining them to see if he could find the money that we couldn't. He must be hiding behind the walls all the time, wherever we are, listening to us. He's already got all the money we've found, up to now," she mentioned again, mournfully.

"Well, it doesn't seem as if he found any in the irons," Jack said. "They look just the same."

Uncle Will spoke, his voice quavering just a bit with excitement that he managed to control in the interests of suspense. "Amy, please pour me another cup of coffee, and I'll tell you what 'one flew over the two gooses' nest' means. I just remembered."

"Uncle Will!" she shrieked, grabbing the coffee pot and spilling some on Jack's foot. He shrieked too. "Tell us!"

He deliberately sugared and creamed his coffee, smiling a little. Then he said, "It's a play on words. I think. I think I meant f-l-u-e. Now do you see, Amy?"

" 'One *flue* over the two gooses' nest'?" Amy said, puzzled.

"Look in the dictionary," UncleWill prodded gently.

"Oh, I see!" Sally cried, and Miles said, "Yes! It's the chimney. *Flue* means chimney, Amy. The chimney over the two flatirons."

They were all at the hearth in an instant, searching the old gray bricks of the chimney-place. "Here's a loose one!" Jack cried. He pried it out with the end of the poker. Behind it was a neat little hiding place. On a kind of ledge stood a flat tin tobacco box. In the box was a fifty dollar bill.

"I found it! I found it!" Jack shouted.

"But—" Amy said, disappointed, "it's still only a smidgen. It's not the whole rest of the thirty-five hundred dollars. And we need that big money. Uncle Will needs it bad."

"We'll find it," Miles said, consoling her.

"Don't—" The choked-off word was Hop's. He had started to say something and then couldn't.

"What do you mean?" Miles said sternly.

"Nothin'."

Amy said softly, "Don't be afraid, Hop. We're your friends." But Hop shook his head and obstinately refused to explain.

Uncle Will said, "Miles, I wonder if you'd do me a favor and keep this money for me? Then if anybody knocks me out again, trying to get it—they won't."

"Glad to, Mr. Will."

"That's very sensible, Uncle Will," Mama said.

"Hey!" Amy thought of something. "That 'flue' must mean the other two chimneys too! East is where the sun's rising right now—'one flue east'—that's the chimney on the east wall, and 'one flue west' is the one on the opposite side. Let's go!"

Disappointment again. There were simply no loose bricks in either of the chimney faces. "Well," Miles suggested, "let's look on the outside. After all, the verse didn't specify in those two clues, the way it did in the one over the two gooses' nest. That one had to be inside, but the other two could refer to outside chimneys."

"Well, we'll have to hurry," Sally pointed out. "It's only about two hours until the Blessing ceremony starts, and we have to dress and get our boats ready down at the docks. We have to paddle them to a place in the procession, don't we? And we haven't even tacked the garlands on yet."

"Maybe we'd better get the boats dressed first," Miles said, but Amy begged, "Oh, don't stop now! There's plenty of time yet. Let's see if the outside chimneys have any holes."

But they didn't. After a thorough search, even Amy had to admit that there was no use wasting any more time on the chimneys right then. "All right," she said,

"but while we're getting the boats ready, will everybody please think? We've got to figure out those clues! Before somebody else does. That whoever-it-is who's bugging us might get bright and find all the money just before we do. Especially while we're all down at the docks for the Blessing and he has a clear field."

"I'll be here," Hop said with difficulty, swallowing hard. "I'll keep watch. As long as you haven't found it yet—maybe—"

"Good boy, Hop!" Uncle Will said. "Buster can stay with you."

Miles frowned, but he couldn't say no.

"Let's see," Mama said. "The children will be in the boats, paddling down to where the procession starts. I'll drive Uncle Will down to the docks in the car."

"The small boats' end of the procession isn't very far from here," Miles told her, "on the edge of the Sound. We join in behind the shrimp fleet after it comes from the ocean into the Sound. You and Mr. Will can hear the Field Mass, too, before the priests move down to the docks. We'll miss that."

He went home and back hurriedly, to put on a clean shirt and get his white peaked yachting cap. Jack wished he had a cap too, but it was too late to get one. Uncle Will consoled him with a flag he found among his varied possessions—a flag to fly on the bow of the

bateau. "It's a skull-and-crossbones!" Jack cried delightedly. "Thanks, Uncle Will. Where'd you get a pirate flag? Were you ever a pirate?"

"No, but I was at the Gasparilla Festival at Tampa once," Uncle Will told him, "and somehow I happened to be in charge of a sea chest full of pirate flags. This one got left over. I always knew it would come in handy sometime."

"The Gasparilla Festival is a sort of pageant," Mama explained to Jack, "in which people dress up like pirates and act out a pirate invasion of the city. They have a battle and the pirates win and take over the city. Just for a day."

"Can we go sometime and see it?"

"We'll see. I think it happens in February. Remind me some February."

"I will," Jack said earnestly. "Matter-of-fact, I always did want to go to a pirate thing like that."

Amy and Sally had finished draping the two small boats on the beach with thumb-tacked garlands, and Miles fastened Jack's skull-and-crossbones to fly bravely at the bow of Uncle Will's. Uncle Will found a Confederate flag for Miles's boat. Both looked very festive, and Sally and Amy hurried to put on their most colorful shorts and shirts.

Just as they finished dressing, they heard the boys

rushing up the stairs. Jack burst in, shouting, "Miles had an idea! Let's look, quick, before we have to go!"

"Look where?"

"Silly—you forgot. There're two chimneys upstairs too! One flue east and one flue west—up here, too!"

It was lucky there hadn't been a fire in the two upstairs fireplaces for years, Amy thought, or Jack would have been too smutty to go in the procession at all. He was poking inside the east room chimney, looking for a loose brick or any hiding place, and he was getting pretty dirty even without soot.

"Whee! Here's a loose brick!" he cried, and pried it out, this time with his fingernails.

"There it is." Miles leaned over, and he and Jack bumped heads trying to get the red tobacco box out of the small opening. Jack fumbled it open and took out a folded bill. Yes—another fifty dollars.

"But only fifty." Amy sighed. She had set her heart on finding the fortune for Uncle Will, and each succeeding smaller find only seemed to deepen her disappointment.

"Never mind," Miles comforted her. "There's bound to be a break-through soon. We've got to find it. We're so close."

"Hurry and see what's in the west chimney," Sally said, "so we can get going to the Blessing."

Jack was already at the other chimney, poking and prying. Just as he found another tobacco box, he inadvertently put his foot against the back of the fireplace —they were old country-style, log-burning fireplaces without any grates, almost large enough to stand up in —and his weight sent his foot through the crumbling mortar, collapsing a couple of square feet of ancient firebricks at the back. "Hey!" he shouted, drawing back his foot and poking his head in instead. "There's a hole here. There's a rope ladder! And there was another fifty in this little old box." He hurriedly handed the money to Miles to hold for Uncle Will, and stuck his head in the hole again.

"Well!" Miles exclaimed. "I didn't mean a literal break-through!"

"The procession will just have to start without us," Amy said breathlessly. "After all, it won't hurt if we're the last boats even—we've got to find out where this goes to."

"But we'll get all dirty," Sally wailed. "Look at Jack. Just look at him!"

"You don't have to come." Amy was all for following Jack right through the fireplace, like Alice through the looking glass. But Miles held her back, and caught Jack.

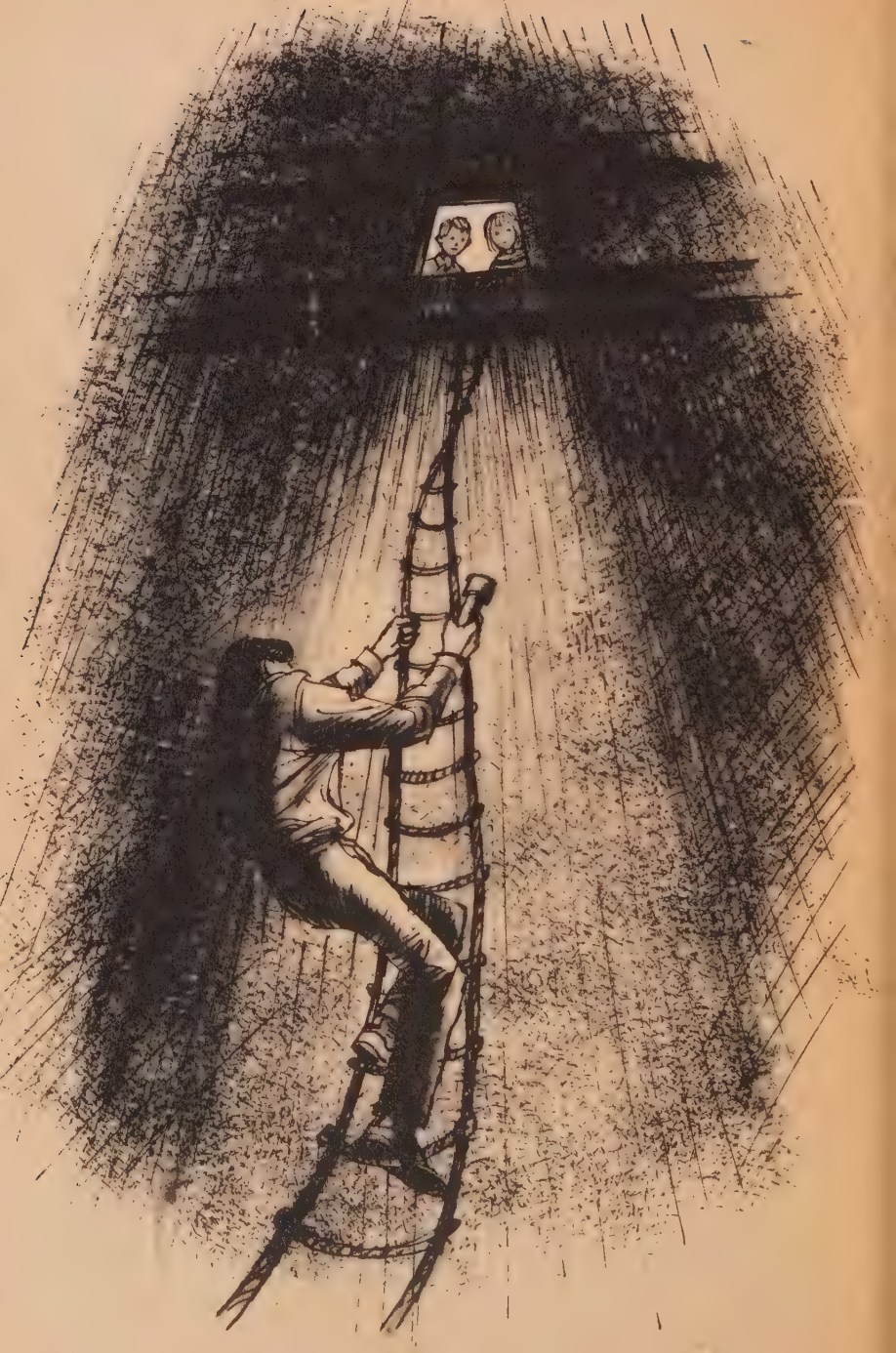
"Wait. Let's see if it's safe. Will that rope ladder hold

any weight?" He reached in and yanked at it. "It seems to be fairly new," he reported grimly. "Whoever's been coming in and out put it there recently, it's obvious. And this narrow open shaft between the chimney—which was once on an outside wall—and the rebuilt outside wall is one that escaped me when I was exploring the other double-studded walls. Of course it comes out somewhere down below. It seems to start from right over there." He came out of the fireplace and went to the place in the wall where he thought the rope ladder started. "There ought to be a sliding panel or something right about here," he said. "It this it?"

Amy held her breath and Jack said, "Hurry, Miles."

"Yes!" Miles said. His fingernail touched a crack and the wall slid open. There was a narrow aperture just big enough for a man to come through. "It's a new opening. How did we miss it? It's been cut recently—it wasn't the pirates' idea." Here the rope ladder was secured to a beam. "I'm going down it and see where it leads to," Miles said. "Hand me that flashlight, please, Amy. And you-all wait. After all, he might be down there now."

He started down the rope ladder, holding on with one hand, the flashlight in the other. The rope swayed; Amy and Jack, their faces in the opening, could see the light moving back and forth in the dim shaft. Then they



heard an exclamation, and the light disappeared. They cried, "Miles!" and heard his voice from far off answer, "Wait—"

Then, after an interminable period, his ordinary, everyday voice said behind them, "Well, here I am."

"Miles! How did you get out?"

"That's the way he's been coming and going, all right. The shaft comes out at an entrance he's made to the pirates' tunnel. I came in through it. He could get in and out either at the top here or at the trap door behind the bar, or down on the bluff. If that fireplace hadn't caved in, we might not ever have found out how he did it."

"But—" Uncle Will was at the foot of the stairs; he had been there when Miles emerged from the trap door. "Hasn't the tunnel caved in, Miles? It's been years since anyone went through there."

"Wrong, Mr. Will. If we had ever explored it from the other end, as we planned to, we'd have seen that someone has cleaned it out and shored it up recently. There's some sort of smuggling or something going on, using that tunnel. It opens out into a kind of cave that's been dug out of the bluff at the other end. And there are buckets and stuff—I didn't have time to see what all. But I'll bet all my pieces of eight that it's some kind of illegal racket!"

The Pirates' Tunnel

"We'd better go and see, right now!" Jack said.

"Have we got time?" Sally said. "Won't it wait? The Blessing is at ten o'clock and we haven't got our boats in place yet."

"I don't care. I've got to see now!" Amy said. "We've still got half an hour. Please, Sally?"

She knew how much the Procession meant to Sally, and she had counted on hers and Jack's place in it, too. But she thought they could do both if they hurried.

"Rush it, then!" Miles wanted to know what was going on in that cave, too, even at the risk of missing the Procession. But Amy as she hurried promised herself that she wouldn't let him miss it. Sally deserved to get her wish. It was such a little wish—she wasn't wishing for a Queen's crown like Anita's or even for a ride on a big shrimp boat.

Uncle Will got down to the shore somehow, almost as fast as the rest of them. And when he took one look

at the gear assembled in the cave, he said, "I'll bet I know what they've been doing. They've been bootlegging contaminated oysters. See, these buckets are full of oysters and dry ice. Somebody's been taking them out of the polluted oyster beds below here and smuggling them into town at some certain time to be picked up and shipped. It's—why, it's almost murder! Those things aren't fit to eat. The Health Department warned people they'd be poisoned if they did."

"We'll trap him," Miles promised him. "We'll get the sheriff."

"After the Procession," Amy reminded him. "Come on—we might get there in time. These old oysters aren't going to run away. And the bootleggers probably won't pick them up before night. They'd have to work in the dark."

"It's probably just one man anyhow," Hop said, and then looked as if he wished he'd bitten off his tongue before he spoke.

"How do you know?" Miles whirled on him. "What do you know about it?"

"Nothin'. I was just guessin', that's all."

Miles didn't have time to check him out any further right then, but Amy could see him planning to later. "Come on, Miles!" she urged. "You and Sally go first. Jack and I'll come after."

Hop and Buster wandered back toward the inn from

the shore, looking vaguely forlorn. Mama and Uncle Will watched the boat-launching, and waved good luck before getting into the car to drive to the docks.

Now the day seemed to brighten, to Amy. The sun shone more white-hot every minute, and gleams of light flickered from the tiny wavelets that lapped against the boats. The sky was a brilliant summer blue, without a single cloud. When they joined the other small boats, all decked in flowers and flags, her heart bounced up and down with joy, like the waves. She felt like singing, even though she knew she could never carry a tune. A verse from the Bible came into her mind, one she had heard in Sunday School and had made a mental note not to forget: "This is the day that the Lord hath made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Even if they hadn't found Uncle Will's money and diamond yet, there was plenty to be glad about, she told herself resolutely. And the jubilant atmosphere made her optimistic. Surely today would be the day. Surely the Blessing would bring them good luck.

The shrimp boats, all shining with new paint and decked with bunting, came into the Sound from the ocean, one after the other, their nets draped from masts, their many-colored flags flying. Miles had said every one of them had a crucifix hanging over the steering

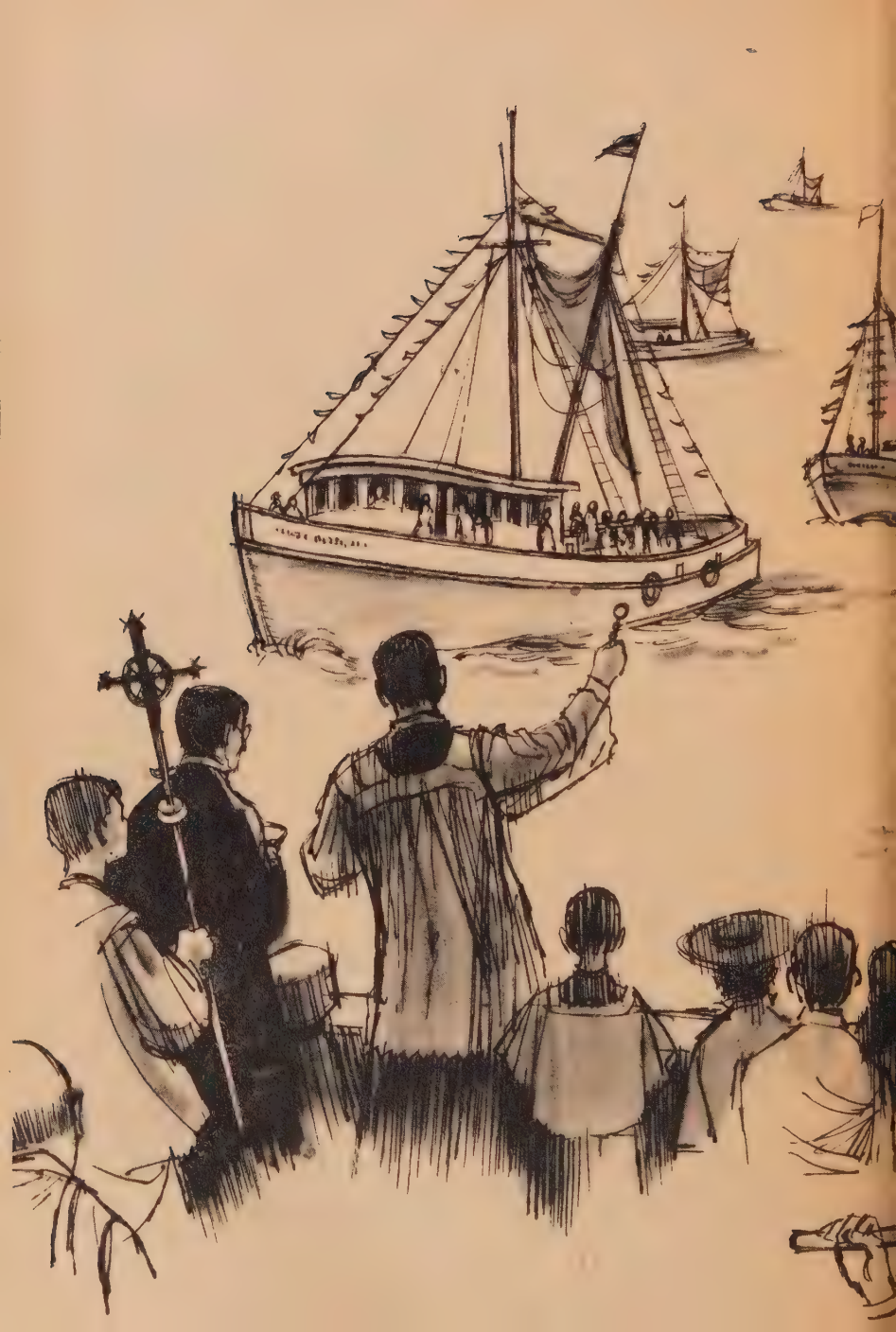
wheel, and most of them also had a picture of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus. Girls in bright dresses, men in white pants and colorful jerseys crowded the decks, where wreaths of flowers hung ready to be flung to the waves later, In Memoriam. Uncle Will had told them that three shrimpers had lost their lives in a hurricane during the past year. Music was playing on some of the boats, but it was hushed as they approached the dock. Coast Guard boats, then private yachts, then small boats followed.

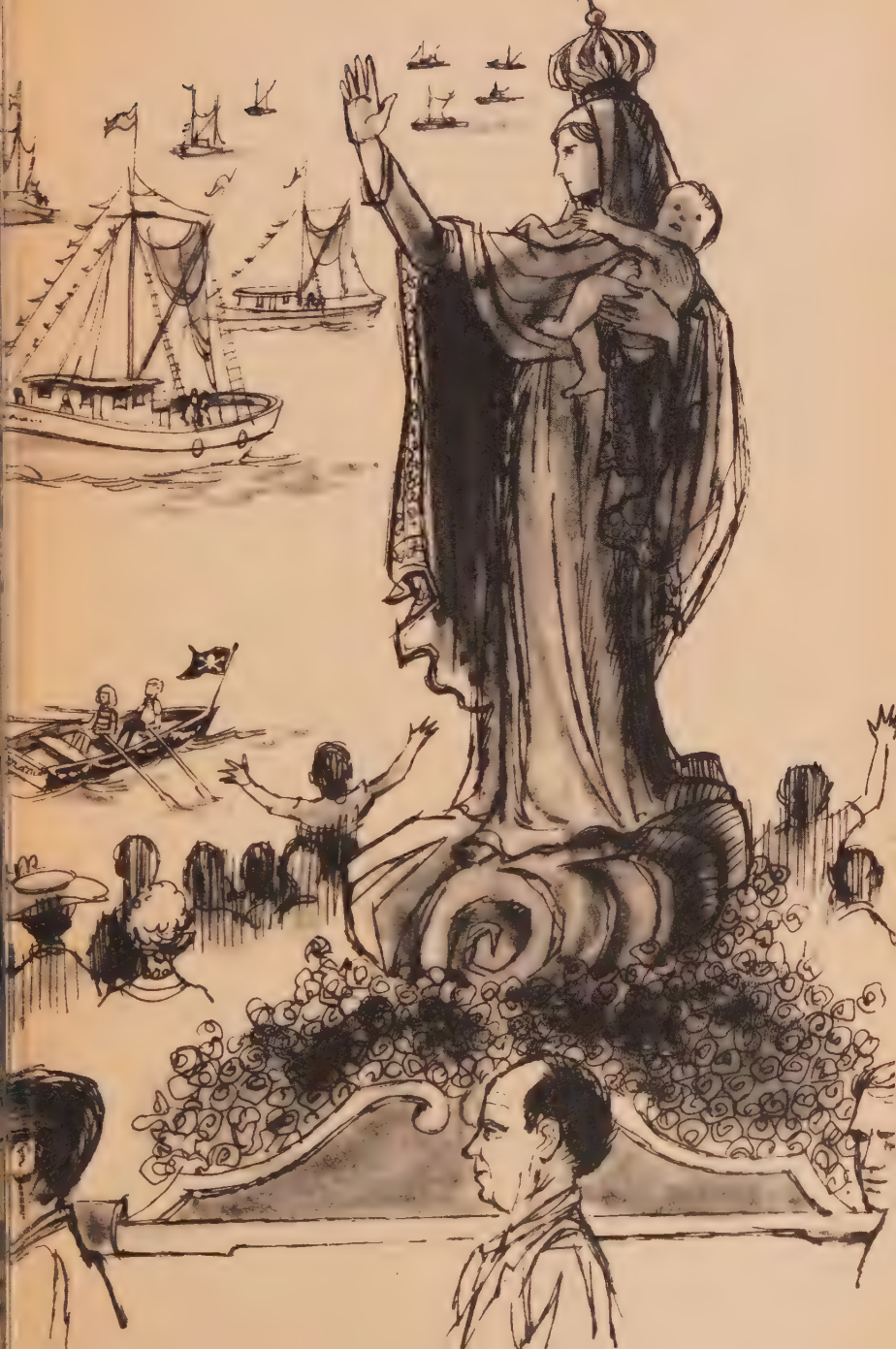
Amy told Jack, "I want to hear what's going on. You know Uncle Will gave me that piece to read about the Blessing, and I want to hear the 'Traditional Roman Ritual for the Solemn Blessing of Fishing Vessels.' Reckon we could get out of line and sneak in closer to the dock, and then later get back in line to get Blessed?"

"Matter-of-fact, we could get right next to the dock, if we tried. Everybody's watching the big boats and those people on the dock. Nobody'd bother about us."

Amy maneuvered with her paddle until she was where she could hear it all. Distantly, Sally motioned for her to get back in line, but she shook her head vehemently, and Miles's boat was too far away for them to try to communicate. Amy waved to Sally, and then turned her back, looking toward the priest.

Now he was praying, ". . . and with Thy whole hand





bless these vessels and all that shall be borne in them, as Thou didst bless Noah in the ark during the deluge; extend to them Thy right hand as Thou didst extend it to blessed Peter walking upon the sea . . . steer them over a tranquil course to the ports of their desires. . . ."

Amy thought, The ports of our desires are to find the money and diamond for Uncle Will. Steer us to them, please, God. . . . There was another Bible verse that said, Seek and ye shall find. Of course we'll find them. Because we care. You have to care about somebody else more than yourself. We care about Uncle Will. Please, God?

Now the priest was telling the story of Simon Peter and the other disciples going fishing, and not catching any until Jesus stood on the shore and asked them, "Young men, have you any fish?"

Amy heard the priest's voice, carried far on the wind, but clear, saying, "They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right of the boat and you will find them.' "

Then she heard nothing more of the story, because clear bright bells were ringing in her head. Her prayer was answered—at least part of it. She knew where Uncle Will's diamond was.

She didn't see any way to get out of the boat right then and go find it, though. Besides, maybe she ought to

get blessed—since it was the Blessing's Ritual that had given her the clue. She waited impatiently, while the priest finished the story and began his next prayer, "O God, who, dividing the waters from the dry land, didst create all living things that inhabit them—"

Amy couldn't wait; she had to tell Jack. She whispered, "Hey! I just found out where the diamond is!"

Jack let out a squeak, and she sh-sh-sh-ed him quickly. "Tell you later."

"—and didst will to set up man in power over the fishes of the sea—"

"How'd you know?"

"The priest told me. Wait till this is over."

"—Who, in walking upon the sea, didst command the winds and the waves: Who by Thy word didst fill the nets of Thy Apostles, grant, O God, we pray Thee, that Thy servants in their vessels may be protected through Thy aid, that they may enclose great multitudes of fishes in their nets, and that finally, laden with merit, Thou mayst bring them safely to the shores of eternal blessedness. Through Christ our Lord, Amen."

There were still more of the lovely, appropriate words that Amy heard as in a daze, about "the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, that pass through the paths of the sea." Then the two priests, one in a white surplice, the other in a black cassock, stood at the edge of the

dock. The one in white held a handled silver ball with holes in it like a pomander, which he dipped in a golden bowl of holy water held by the second priest, and then sprinkled each boat as it moved slowly past the dock, the sun glittering on the separate drops of water flung from the silver-handled globe. As he waved the ball, he intoned, "May the peace and benediction of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, descend upon these vessels, and upon all who shall be in them, and may this peace and blessing endure forever. Amen."

The big shrimp boats were all blessed now, and the Coast Guard vessels, and the yachts. Amy saw the little boats flocking up like a school of minnows, Sally and Miles maneuvering among them. She paddled to the end of the line and when the priest sprinkled her boat's prow (and even the pirate flag!) with the lovely bright drops of holy water, Amy lifted her face toward the sky and said reverently, "Thanks."

Then she paddled quickly to where Miles and Sally were waiting at the edge of the Sound, to take the boats back to beach them at home. They waved to Uncle Will and Mama, and Amy shouted, "Hurry home—I've got a clue!" But though they did go straight to the car, Amy doubted that they heard her. The wind probably carried her words right out to sea where the shrimp boats were sailing to drop their wreaths on the outgoing tide.

"What do you mean—you've got a clue?" Sally asked.

"Clue to what?" Miles demanded.

"To the diamond. I said a prayer when the priest was praying, and what do you think? It was answered the next minute. He said something that makes me pretty sure where the diamond is."

"Tell us!"

Jack said, "I didn't hear anything about diamonds, and I was listening practically all the time."

"I didn't either," Sally said.

"Wait till I see if it's there," Amy said mysteriously. She loved keeping them in suspense, even though she could hardly wait to tell them how clever she was at putting two and two together.

They beached the boats and dashed up to The Bucket of Blood, Amy in the lead, Jack panting right behind. Sally and Miles weren't much slower. Mama and Uncle Will were already there, in the pirates' shadowy barroom, drinking lemonade, to cool off from being so long in the hot sun.

"Hey!" Jack shouted to them. "Mama! Uncle Will! Amy thinks she knows where the diamond is!"

The Diamond and the Big Money

"Have some lemonade," Mama said.

"Didn't you hear me, Mama?"

"Yes, but—we've had so many thrills like that. It'll probably be another disappointment."

Amy was taking the shrimp net down from where it was draped over the mantel. "Remember 'The Purloined Letter'?" she said excitedly, searching the edge of of the circular net where the sinkers were sewn in. "If I'm right, it was right here in front of our eyes all the time."

She found the one sinker that was irregular, not smooth and round like the others. "Is this it, Uncle Will? Is this the diamond?"

He looked closely; he had already put on his glasses. "Why, Amy, it is! It surely is. I do almost remember now—sewing it in there to hide it."

"But how did you know, Amy?" Jack prodded while

Uncle Will cut the net with his pocketknife and released the rough diamond, holding it out to Amy. "How did the priest tell you?"

Amy passed it around for everybody to examine, while she explained. "He said that Jesus said to Peter, 'Cast the net to the right of the boat and you will find them.' Cast-the-net, cast-the-net, kept clicking in my mind until I remembered what it sounded like—"

"Castanets!" Sally said.

"Right! And then I put two and two together, and remembered Uncle Will's casting net that was hanging on the wall—and that was why he thought of Spanish dancers, because of castanets sounding like casting-net —and in my mind I saw the net and it had grayish sinkers around the edge, and the diamond was grayish—so—"

"So here it is!" Miles examined the diamond and handed it back to Uncle Will. "I always said you had a clever sister, Sally." He patted Amy on the back in exaggerated congratulation, and she felt like purring. It was nice to be the one to find the diamond.

"Of course, Uncle Will's subconscious said 'shrimping' the last time we tried the Ouija," she said, remembering. "We should have guessed." Then she went on, "But we still haven't found the rest of the money. We've got to have that three thousand dollars. All

Uncle Will has is that last hundred and fifty we found in the chimneys."

"There's one more clue we haven't cracked," Miles said thoughtfully. " 'Three geese in a flock.' Amy, put your brains to work again. You found two gooses. What about three geese?"

"We already looked up *geese*," she reminded him, sitting down now at the table with a glass of lemonade. "And all it said was 'plural of goose.' " She pulled a pad of paper and a pencil toward her and began to doodle, printing idly, *Three gees—*

"Here comes trouble!" Jack exclaimed. "Miss Dibble —and a man—"

Miss Dibble came in without knocking, as usual. "Well, how is everybody today?" she said heartily. "Mr. Durden, this is Mr. Powers of the Health and Welfare Department. He's going to inspect your sanitary arrangements, and if you can't meet the requirements—well, that's just one more reason for moving to the Golden Age Haven, where we can look after you and there are plenty of nice bathrooms. Remember the Three Gs—it's Great to be a Grand Old Man in the Golden Age Haven!"

Uncle Will looked harassed. "We've found my diamond, and in a few days probably I can sell it for enough money—" he began. Mama held it out for Miss Dibble to see.

"That pebble!" Miss Dibble sniffed. It was clear she didn't know about rough diamonds, Amy thought.

But before anybody could explain them to her, Hop pulled Amy by the arm and whispered, pointing to the paper she had been doodling on, "Three gees—look—you got three gees—"

"So what? I was just printing 'Three geese in a flock.' "

"But she said 'three gs' and I saw this spelled three g-e-e-s and—you'd just mentioned three thousand dollars." He was stammering with excitement. "Where I come from," he told her, "three thousand dollars is three grand. Three gs."

"Hey!" Amy said. "That might be it! Sure enough, Hop! You've got it, I bet. But—three gs in a flock?"

Miss Dibble said, still with that sickening delicacy, ignoring Amy and Hop, "So Mr. Powers is going to look at your sanitary arrangements—" and without permission she walked through the kitchen with him, and out to the back yard.

Miles had been listening to Hop and Amy instead of to Miss Dibble. "Amy," he said with controlled excitement, "*flock* is the one word we haven't looked up in the dictionary. And the Ouija—or Mr. Will's subconscious mind—did keep insisting about the dictionary, that last time we tried it and got *shrimping*." He handed her the big book.

This time it was the second part of the first meaning that made Amy shriek with excitement. "This is it!" she said. "I just know it is! See: 'woolen or cotton refuse cut up and used for stuffing furniture, beds, etcetera.' Stuffing furniture! The sofa or the chair! 'Three gs in a flock'! Hurry!"

"Well, they weren't worth much as furniture anyhow," Uncle Will said philosophically as the five of them—Hop was going at it too, just like the others—tore up the sofa and armchair. The floor was littered with flock.

And in the bottom of the armchair, where the stuffing was loose around the springs, they found a flat metal box with thirty one-hundred-dollar-bills in it.

Miles counted them out loud, while the others looked on in awe.

"Just think, Miles," Sally said, "you were sitting on it every night!"

They were all concentrating on the money, and not noticing anything else, until they heard a rough voice from the staircase say, "Hand it over and back up against the wall, all of you!"

Sally shrieked, "It's him!" and Amy screamed too. There stood a strange man, dirty, and unshaved and menacing, and he was holding a pistol pointed straight at Miles. "Give me that money—or I'll shoot—"

Before Miles could decide whether to be a dead hero or not, Hop—little old skinny Hop—was doing the hero act to save Uncle Will's money from the bandit. Hop flung himself at the man with the gun, straight into the line of fire, hollering, "Come on, Miles—Jack —get him—"

He had grabbed the man's pistol arm and the gun was right in his stomach. Amy shut her eyes, knowing she'd hear the shot in a minute.

But there wasn't any shot. Miles had leaped almost as soon as Hop did, and Jack tumbled into the fray late. They overpowered the struggling man and sat on him, Miles holding his arms behind his back in a hammer lock, until Jack could bring a rope to tie him up with secure Boy Scout knots.

"He looks like Frank Ledbetter's black-sheep cousin, Vern Padgett," Uncle Will said mildly. "I believe it is Vern Padgett. Always was a no-good cuss. That could be how he knew I had the money—heard what Frank paid me for that land—"

Vern Padgett scowled at him, but didn't speak.

"Hop, you were wonderful!" Amy said. "And to think we sort of doubted you, sometimes."

"Aw, it wasn't nothin'," Hop said, ducking his head. "Mr. Will was good to me. I couldn't let him get away with Mr. Will's money."

"But you might have been killed!"

"Naw. I knowed that gun wasn't loaded."

"How'd you know that?"

"I took the bullets out of it, that's how. Last night. He was asleep and didn't know it. Down in the cave."

"So—that's what you were doing when we wondered where you went," Miles said. "But he might have reloaded it, you know. You were taking a chance." He shook his head.

"Naw," Hop said again. "I took all the rest of the bullets."

"You knew about the tunnel—and the cave?"

"Sure." He motioned with his head toward the trussed-up man. "He brought me here to help him get that money. Mr. Will—" He looked pleadingly toward Uncle Will, and confessed desperately, "I lied to you. He made me. It was all a lie. Except about the foster home. Vern's my stepfather. After my ma died, the Welfare put me in a foster home—lots of foster homes. Because he wasn't a fit person, they said, to have charge of a boy. He had a record. But that last home I was in, it was a mean one, and he come and sneaked me out of it. I was willin' to go with him because I couldn't stand it there. He figured out this idea of gettin' me in with Mr. Will, to find out where the money was hid, so he could steal it—and then after he found the tunnel and

got it cleaned out, he heard about how he could make money bootleggin' oysters, while he was waitin' to find Mr. Will's. Then he fixed up the cave to hide the oysters in till he could sell 'em. He kept slippin' in the house, watchin' to see if we found the money—and I sneaked out to meet him sometimes, tryin' to get him to give up and go away. But he wouldn't. He thought he had a good thing in them oysters—and a perfect place for a hideout. I didn't want to help him, Mr. Will. I hindered him all I could. And when I seen he had got a gun from somewhere, I knowed I had to get the bullets out of it or somebody might get hurt."

"You're a brave boy, Hop," Uncle Will said. "Thanks, son."

Miles said, "I apologize, Hop. I suspected you—"

Amy said, "I told you he was a good kid."

Jack suggested, "Let's see if he's still got the money he took from Uncle Will."

Miss Dibble and Mr. Powers returned then, talking briskly about the sanitary arrangements. "What in the world—?" Miss Dibble said when she saw Padgett, tied, lying on the floor, while Miles took three hundred and fifty dollars from his turned-out pocket and gave it to Uncle Will.

"He's a burglar," Jack explained, "trying to hold us up for Uncle Will's money. Only he couldn't—Hop

got him. We just found the three thousand. See!" He gloated over the box of bills, showing her how very solvent Uncle Will was. "He'll have a fine bathroom—any day now!"

Miss Dibble's gasp of defeated amazement gave Amy a lot of satisfaction.

"I'll just take charge of that gun," Mr. Powers said when he had heard the whole story, including the oyster bootlegging as well as the breaking-and-entering and the armed-robbery. "And the man, too. It happens I'm a deputy sheriff, along with my other duties. He'll get at least twenty years—maybe more."

"We don't allow criminals to rob our Golden Age citizens," Miss Dibble said, feebly joining in.

"Now look here, Miss Dribble," Uncle Will said vigorously, "that's all I want to hear about Golden Age citizens. I'm a responsible property-owner with enough money to take care of all my needs. I have plenty of friends and relatives to call on if I need help. So will you kindly forget about me?"

"But—" Miss Dibble wasn't giving up without a struggle, "after they go home, who's to look after you? I'd be glad to look in on you from time to time, even if you won't—"

"No," Uncle Will said firmly. "Thanks all the same, Miss Dribble. But I'm going to have Hop here to look

after me. He's sixteen, and today he proved he's a man."

"Oh?" Miss Dibble said weakly. "Well—if you have a relative to stay with you—if his mother leaves him to look after you—" She gave up. Amy thought gleefully, She still thinks Hop's our brother.

"I told you I had plenty of relatives," Uncle Will said. "Did I forget to mention the Hopkins side of the family?" He winked solemnly at Amy. "Too bad I'm so forgetful. Good-by, Miss Dribble."

They went outside to watch while Mr. Powers put Vern Padgett, all doubled up and with hands still tied behind him, into the car's tiny back seat; and saw with fascination that the front seats could hold another passenger as well as Miss Dibble. Jack bet Hop a sand dollar that both Mr. Powers and Miss Dibble couldn't get into the car. It was a tight squeeze, but he lost.

Miles said, "I'm going to ask the president of the Port Oglethorpe bank to put this money—and the diamond—in a safe place right now. He'll do it, even if it is Sunday, I'm sure. Okay, Mr. Will?"

"That's a good idea. Thanks, Miles."

"Want to come, Sally?"

Amy watched them drive off, thinking, I'll be sixteen before long, and I'll have to learn how to turn pink—whether I want to or not.

Mama said to Hop, "I'm so glad nobody can push

Uncle Will around. And that your stepfather can't bother you any more. And that you'll be here to take care of Uncle Will when we leave. We'll have to go home in a day or so."

Hop said, sort of proudly, "Me and Buster." They were sitting on the step, Hop's arm around Buster, Buster's tail thumping.

Jack said, "Good old Buster!" and added, "Good old Hop!"

Uncle Will told them, "We've got to stick up for our right to be independent individuals, not just part of their pattern of organized society."

Jack said thoughtfully, "Matter-of-fact, I believe I'd rather be Jack than Willie."

Uncle Will went on, "We've got to stay free—free to do what we think is right for us, as long as it doesn't interfere with anybody else. We can't let any well-meaning people push us into their pattern."

Mama said charitably, "But there have to be people who care about what happens to other people. That's important. They just ought to be sure not to step on anybody's freedom while they're about it. But there have to be people who care."

Uncle Will said, "Want to go fishing, Amy? Jack? Hop? How about you, Ellen? Come on, Buster!"

Amy looked at Uncle Will and at Buster now leaping

around him, and at the old inn where they were going to stay—where they wanted to be—and her throat swelled inside as if she were about to cry.

" 'William Mr. Trimbletoe,' " she quoted softly, " 'he's a good fisherman.' " But silently in her mind she was answering Mama's words, and exulting, I care! I care! I care!

Bucket of Blood...

reads the old sign hanging over the doorway of the weather-beaten house where Uncle Will lives. But he will have to move to an old-age home unless Sally, Amy and Jack can find the treasure . . . money, and an uncut diamond!

The only clue is a counting-out rhyme: "William Mr. Trimbletoe," it goes, "catches fishes, puts them in dishes . . . " It makes no sense at all.

The sleuthing begins. Each clue brings a new treasure, but as the hunt continues, Sally, Amy and Jack discover that the most important clue is the hardest of all to unravel.

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